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# China

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## PEARLS OF THE ORIENT: SYMPHONY OF LIGHTS

## HISTORY OF BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN

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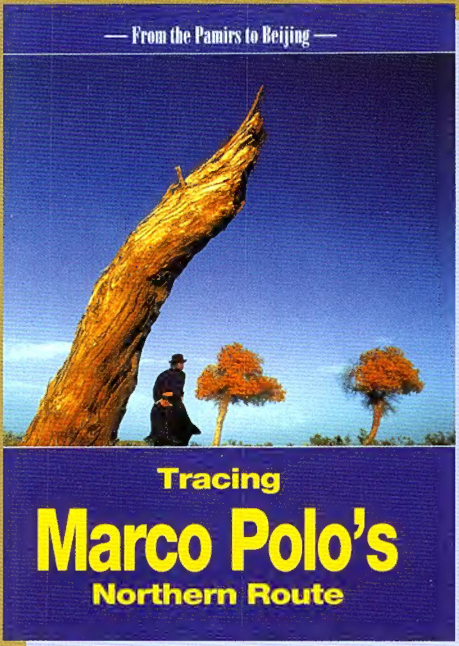
# Photographic & Practical Guides for Your China Tours

Before you set off for your perfect journey, you may have to prepare your itinerary carefully. Each of the following recommended readings offers different types of information which cater to our readers' various interests: exploring, photography, or tourist information. They will be great guides to your China tours.


— From the Pamirs to Beijing —
Tracing
Marco Polo's
Northern Route

## Tracing Marco Polo's Northern Route

A record of an 80-day journey in which our authors drive their jeep 12,000 km long through the northern regions of China following in the footsteps of Macro Polo's historic journey from the Pamir Highland to Beijing. In a medley of images and words, we present you with the fascinating scenery and various ways of life in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet.

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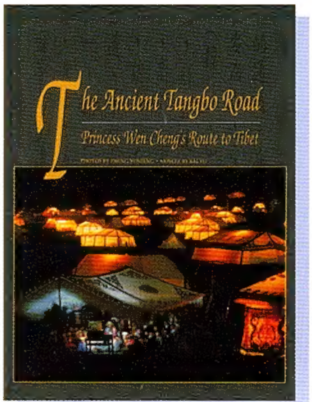
The Ancient Tangbo Road
Princess Wen Cheng's Route to Tibet

## The Ancient Tangbo Road

Covering four provinces including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the ancient Tangbo Road was created on the map when Princess Wen Cheng was sent as a bride to Luoxie (present-day Lhasa) during the Tang Dynasty. Our photographers and writers, who have followed this arduous route, present you the graceful sights and unique ethnic customs on the way.

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## In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route

The ancient Tea Caravan Route can be traced back to 2,000 years ago, starting from Xishuangbanna at China's southwestern end, passing through boundless forests and valleys to the Sino-Indian, Nepalese and Sikkimese borders on Tibet, the "Roof of the World". This book is not-to-be-missed by every daring adventurer.

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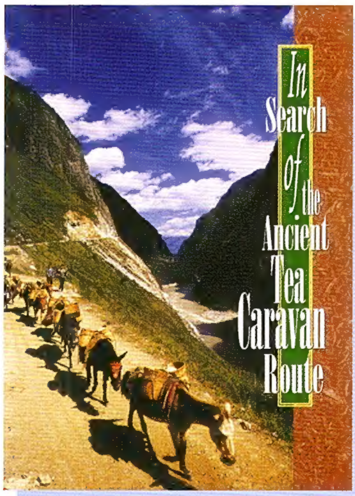
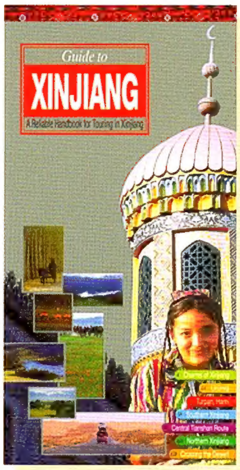

In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route


Guide to
XINJIANG
A Reliable Handbook for Touring in Xinjiang

## Guide to Xinjiang

This book is especially designated for DIY travellers who desire to explore the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are detailed introduction to scenic spots in five main areas in Xinjiang including Urümqi, Turpan, Southern and Northern Xinjiang, and Central Tianshan. Practical tourist information on accommodation, ticketing, shopping, local specialty, as well as travel tips are covered.

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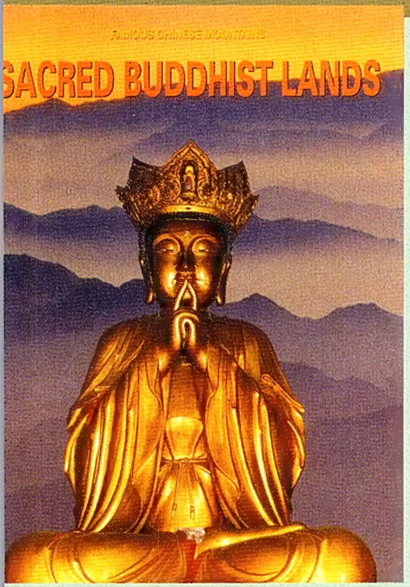

## Sacred Buddhist Lands

Buddhism in China is inevitably linked with some of the country's best known mountains. And going deep in the mountains and far away from civilization is an ideal place for retreat. Belonging to the four Bodhisattvas respectively, the four most famous Buddhist mountains — Wutai, Jiuhua, Putuo and Emei — are nestled with numerous monasteries and nunneries which have been worshipped by pilgrims for thousands of years. Tourists to these places will totally be soaked in "Kingdoms of Buddhism".

**HK$156**

## The Five Sacred Mountains
## The Yellow Mountain

Located in five provinces in China, every of the Five Sacred Mountains — Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, Hengshan and Huashan — has its magnificent natural and cultural landscapes. Besides, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), is also famous for its spectacular rocks, pine trees, and sea of clouds. It will be a great enjoyment in reading both the detailed text and remarkable images by our experienced photographers as recorded in this book.

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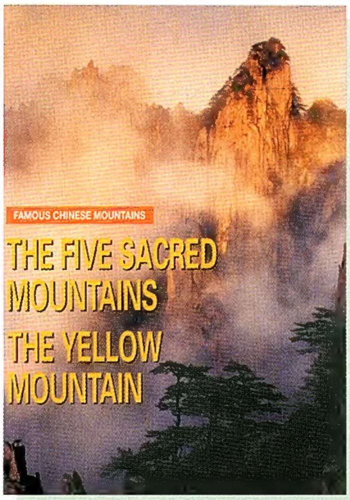

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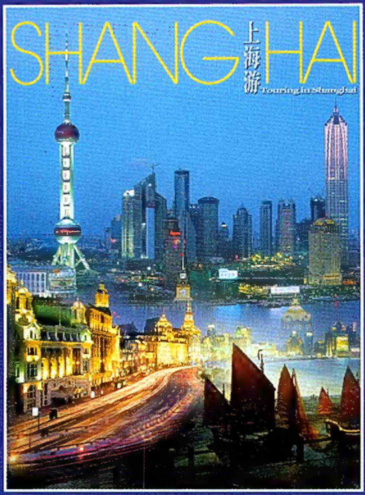
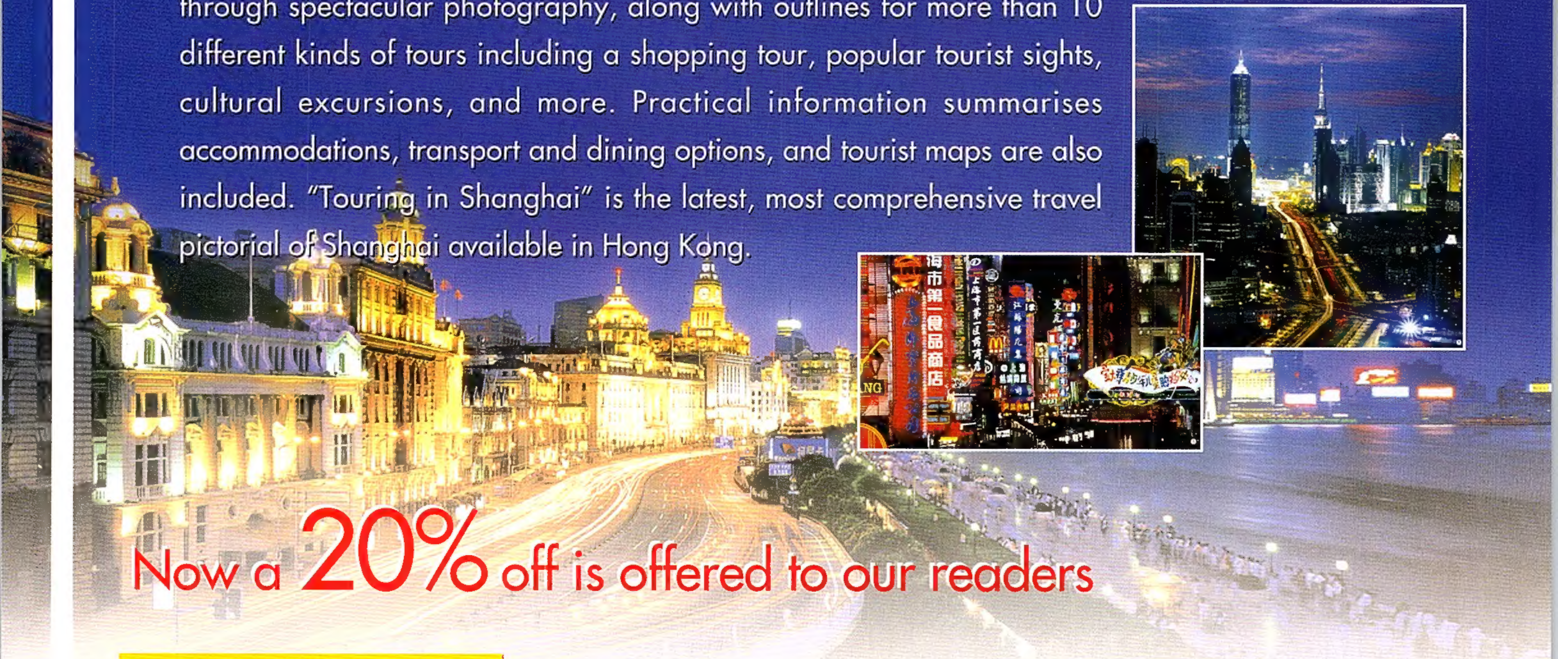


**Shanghai** has evolved at an unprecedented speed for decades into the biggest commercial city in China and one of the great metropolises of the world. Favourably located at the mouth of the Yangtse River, Shanghai has a long history and a rich culture. Commercial tower blocks and traditional buildings exude their individual charms simultaneously in the Pudong District, where hundreds of buildings in different styles, old or new, are collectively known as the Exposition of World Architecture. A kaleidoscope of entertainments and festivals of Old Shanghai attracts scores of entrepreneurs and travellers alike. "Touring in Shanghai" takes you deeper into this vibrant city through spectacular photography, along with outlines for more than 10 different kinds of tours including a shopping tour, popular tourist sights, cultural excursions, and more. Practical information summarises accommodations, transport and dining options, and tourist maps are also included. "Touring in Shanghai" is the latest, most comprehensive travel pictorial of Shanghai available in Hong Kong.



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### Icy Fairyland in Jiuzhaigou

*Photos by Li Jie, Yu Ning, Chan Yat Nin, Li Rong, Dianna Lau* *Article by Dianna Lau*

Travelling through the snow-white beauty of winter is not as romantic as most people would imagine, but if your destination is Jiuzhaigou (Nine-village Valley), then all the effort is worthwhile. The changing landscapes there created by snow and ice show winter at its scenic best.

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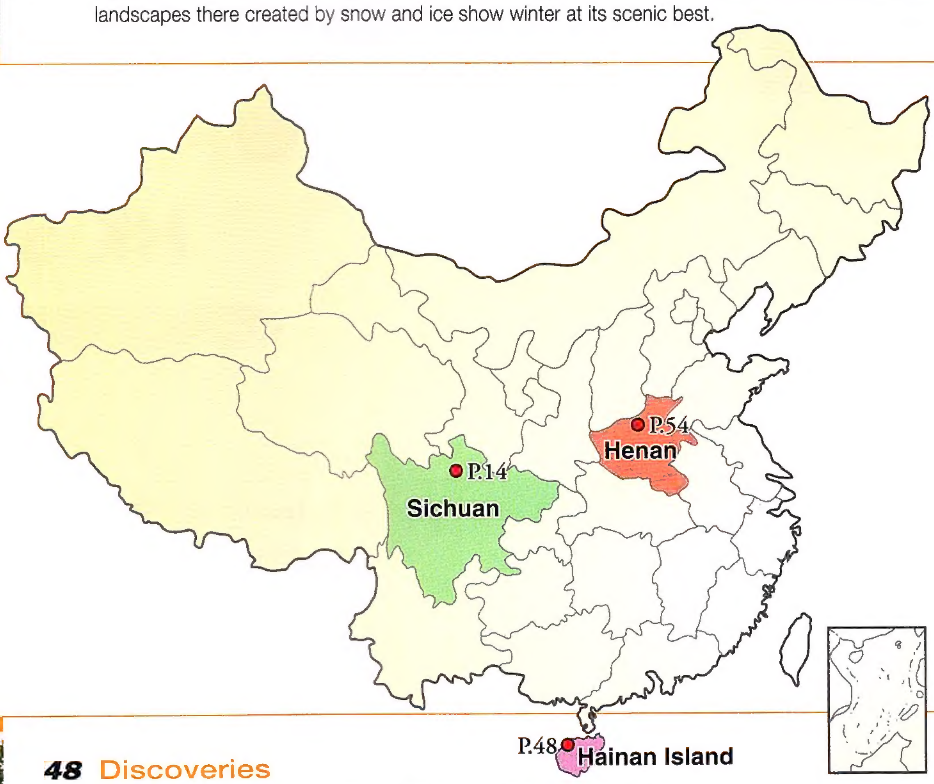

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### Saline Solution — The Saltpan Village of Hainan

*Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong*

About a thousand years ago, a group of migrants from Fujian Province settled in a remote corner of northwestern Hainan Island. Making use of the lava rock, they discovered a unique way to produce salt.

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### Putting My Feet up at Shaolin

*Photos by He Laigui* *Article by Kit*

As I grew up, I thought of enrolling in a martial arts class, but didn't end up making it. Unexpectedly this autumn I toured Henan Province, where I picked up martial arts again as if by a predestined act. What I learned is famously known as Shaolin kung fu.

**60** Culture

### 600 Years of Blue and White Porcelain History

*Photos by Zi Yuan* *Article by Zhu Yuping*

Blue and white porcelain is underglaze-painted in cobalt blue. The bright blue patterns and soft jade-like white glaze complement each other, giving an impression of white clouds in a blue sky.

English Edition

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*Photos & Article by Li Rong*

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*Photos & Article by Yang Bin*

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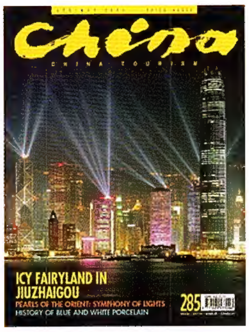
*Photos provided by Ye Pei* *Article by Kit*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**FROM THE EDITOR**

# Icy Fairyland

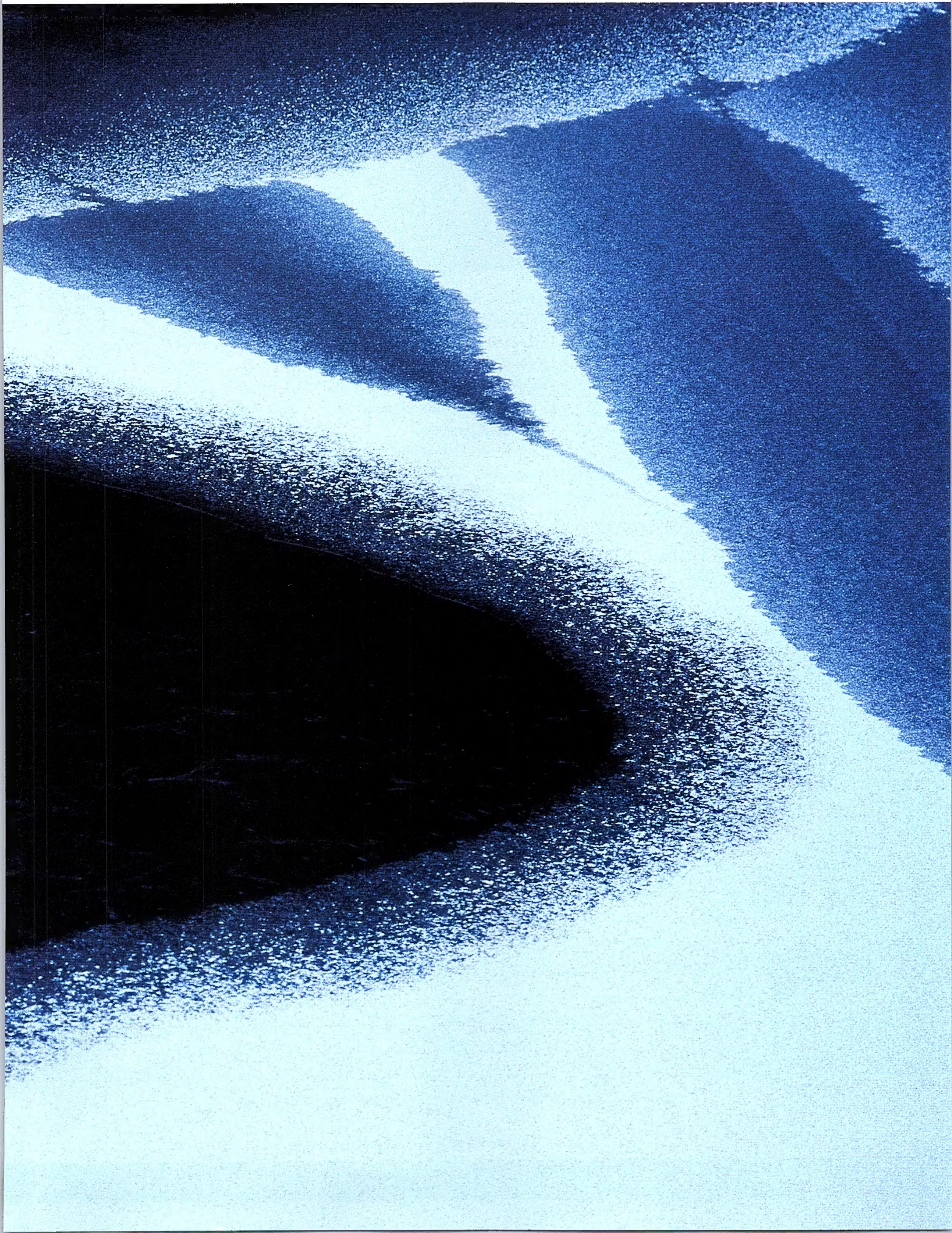
Conventional wisdom tells us that people don't know what they don't have until they come across with the missing piece; therefore, do not be surprise if you finally discover what you have been missing out on once you arrive at Jiuzhaigou (Nine-village Valley).

A mere "gorgeous" is not nearly sufficient to capture the essence of Jiuzhaigou; it's more like "out of this world" or "pure bliss and ecstasy". Unlike other beautiful holiday get-aways, this valley would sweep you off your feet, take you from worldly cares, and let you taste the sweetness of paradise.

Stretching over 72,000 ha in the northern part of Sichuan Province, Jiuzhaigou's sceneries of diverse forest ecosystems, dazzling landscapes, unique karst landforms, breathtaking waterfalls and lakes seem to be taking straight out of a fairytale.

After catching a glimpse of heaven in Jiuzhaigou's sunset, I believe most visitors would have trouble heading off to their next travel destinations — Why would anyone want to be in anywhere else?

Frosty, dream-like scenery in Jinzhaigou (Photo by Li Jie)



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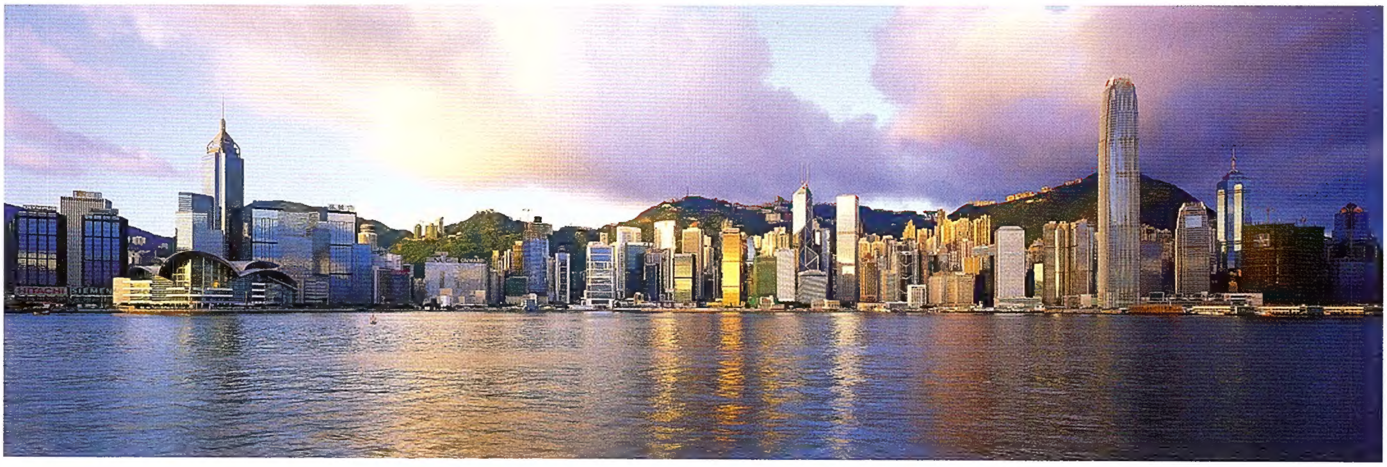

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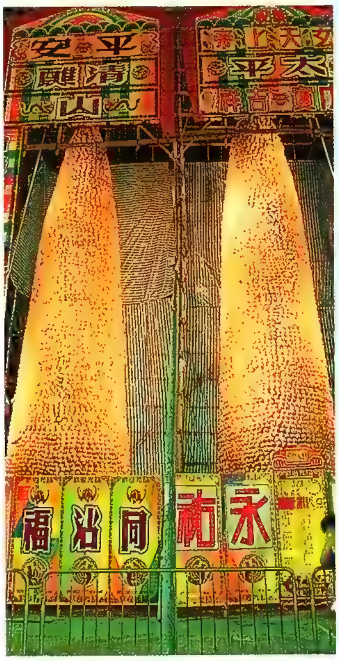
**May 21-31**
**Dalian, Liaoning Province**

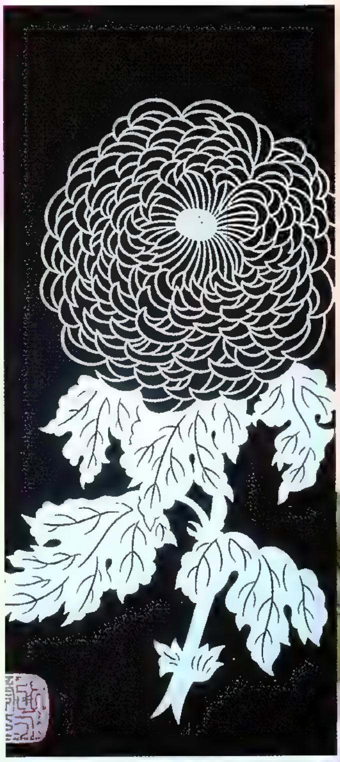
Tourists may appreciate Chinese locust flowers at the **Dalian Chinese Locust Blossom Festival**, watch folk performances, participate in cultural and sports activities, as well as various special tourist activities.

**May 24-28**
**Hong Kong**

Cheung Chau Island is the smallest of the inhabited outlying islands, yet it is the most populated and busiest. Urbanised, but in an odd Chinese-style manner, the district is brimming with sampans that crowd the island's small habour.

The annual **Bun (Steam Bread) Festival** is an exciting celebration which includes the bun tower display, children's parade and special festivities.





**April**
**Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province**

The **Yangzhou Paper Cutting Festival** displays the Yangzhou paper-cut style by local artists. As one of the earliest areas where the art of paper cutting became popular, Yangzhou has a long history which can be dated back to Sui Dynasty (581-618). The Yangzhou style of paper cutting can have more than 1,000 varieties.

**Apr 4**
**Hainan Province**

Legend has it that the Li people living by the Changhua River perished during a major flood. Only a brother by the name of Tianfei and his younger sister, Guanyin, survived. Guanyin later on decided to marry her brother on the 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month, and thus the Li people thrived once again. Gradually this evolved into the **Valentine's Day of the Li** during which young people of the Li communities mingle and scout for suitable lovers.

**Apr 4**
**Nationwide**

**Festival of Pure Brightness** (Qingming Festival) is the family ceremony to remember their beloved deceased. Cleaning ancestors' graves, holding memorial ceremonies, the making of offerings to pay respects to the dead, a spring family outing, and flying kites. Offerings to the dead, which include the burning of ceremonial paper money, are both to honor ancestors and to pray for a year of good luck.

**Apr 25**
**Meizhou Island, Putian, Fujian Province**

Mazu (Heavenly Queen) is the name of a legendary sea goddess who protects fishermen from sea storm. To celebrate her birth, thousands of local residents and compatriots from Taiwan come to pay homage. During the **Fujian Mazu Festival**, visitors take part in the study of Mazu culture and enjoy folk songs, dances and cuisine.

**Apr 21**
**Nanning City or Liuzhou City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region**

The **Guangxi International Folk Song Festival** gathers both the talented Chinese and foreign folk performers, and this is a significant event that is attended by multi-ethnic groups. Visitors may also enjoy the trade fairs and participate in various local tours.

## China Devoted to Developing Global National Park System

China has approved 677 scenic spots, covering an area of over one percent of its territory, to develop a global national park system by the Ministry of Construction (MOC).

The ministry named 26 new national key parks, increasing the country's state-level scenic spots to 177. Meanwhile, a national park administration system corresponding to the global national park system has been set up.

In mid-2004, the 28th session of UNESCO World Heritage Committee, is scheduled to be held in Suzhou city, a scenic destination in east China's Jiangsu Province. China will take this opportunity to further push the protection of its world heritages and natural scenic spots.

## Volcanic Island Listed as National Geological Park

China's biggest volcanic island and a group of ancient sinkholes, both located in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, have been listed as national geological parks. The 41 new geological parks will bring the total number to 85. Weizhou island, a 25-km$^2$ volcanic island, is 26 nautical miles off Beihai, a scenic port city facing Beibu Gulf.

The island is known as a "Museum of Volcanoes" and is thought to be the youngest volcanic island in China as geologists believe its latest eruption dates back about 7,000 to 10,000 years. It is surrounded by a large area of coral reef and is inhabited by 15,000 people.

Each year, the island receives hundreds of thousands of sightseers, who come to view the remains of volcanic eruptions such as craters, pozzolana, lava and unique scenic spots formed by marine abrasion.

## Wild Wet World Awaits Museum Visitors

The Yellow River estuary wetland museum in Dongying city, Shandong Province — the largest of its kind in China — is opened to visitors in April.

The museum, with a show space of more than 7,800 m$^2$, is expected to draw attention to China's largest wetlands, which cover 153,000 ha — equal to the area of half the capital of Shandong Province.

The museum combines functions of collecting and exhibiting specimens, as well as scientific research. It will collect and exhibit the precious natural resources of the area, and will be open free to domestic and overseas scholars and research institutes.

The Yellow River originates from northwestern China's Qinghai — Tibet Plateau, crossing nine provinces in more than 5,500 km, and flows into the Bohai Sea in Dongying. As the sandiest river in the world, it forms more than 3,667 ha of new land each year.

## Yuanmingyuan Garden to Unfold Its Western Wing

Yuanmingyuan, the most magnificent imperial garden in China, has long been one of Beijing's major tourist attractions. But the public has so far been unable to appreciate the garden's beauty in its entirety, due to the destruction wrought by Anglo-French Allied Forces in 1860. A project is currently under way to bring back the original look of the western part of Yuangmingyuan, which for a long time has been buried under ruins.

The first phase of the preservation program is taking place in the long deserted western part of the garden. Initial efforts are being focused on cleaning up the ruins and water system, as well as reinforcement of the riverbanks. In addition, work will be carried out 16 bridges in the garden to restore their original features.

The western part, which is some 700,000 m$^2$ in area, is expected to be opened to the public at the end of this year.

## Fire Threatens Terra-cotta Warriors

A fire struck the Museum of terra-cotta warriors near Xi'an, capital of northwest China's Shaanxi Province in February.

The accident occurred at a cooling tower under construction 100 m away from the No. 1 Pit when sparks splashed from a welding machine and caused fire in the tower. Police and firemen from the museum and the local security bureau rushed to the site immediately. Though fortunately it didn't affect the terra-cotta horses and warriors in the pit, the cooling tower was badly damaged.

Famous as the "world's eighth wonder," the terra-cotta warriors were found in Emperor Qin Shihuang's tomb in Lintong District of Xi'an. The museum established at the site houses 8,000 life-size terra-cotta warriors and horses made in Qin Dynasty (221—207 BC). They have been put on the World Cultural Heritage list.

## Sichuan to put Ruins of Ancient Kingdom on Display

Locals and tourists in China's southwestern Sichuan Province will have a chance to view close-up the ruins of an ancient kingdom and taste the ancient culture, dating back 2,800 to 4,800 years, as a park of RMB $400-million (about US $50 million) will be completed at the ruins of Sanxingdui by the end of the year.

Sanxingdui, located near present-day Guanghan city on the Chengdu Plain, covers 12 km² and is the site of the earliest and largest ruins of the ancient Shu people discovered in China.

Archaeologists have excavated city walls, with an average height of three to five metres and the highest being six metres, sacrificial pits, ruins of residences, tombs, jade and stone pits as well as bronze ware such as big masks and figurines at the site. Excavation of the city walls has provided powerful evidence to support the claim of some archaeologists that Sanxingdui was the capital of the ancient Shu Kingdom.

The six-kilometre-square park was located in the Sanxingdui Ancient Ruins International Cultural Tourism Zone.

## "Glass Giant" Themed Park Ready for Construction

A Qipan Shan "Glass giant" themed park will start construction in September of 2004 and complete in 2006. The human life theme park which was invested and designed by the Germany Tree Entertainment AG, will feature human body structure and life science.

The park will occupy a total area of 860,000 m² and a floor space of 200,000 m².

## Tibet's Tashilunpo Monastery to be Repaired

Plans are being drawn up to renovate the Tashilunpo Monastery, one of the most important temples in Tibet. The renovation follows large investments for the repair of the Potala Palace, Sakya Monastery and Norbu Lingka, three other ancient buildings in the region.

The Tashilunpo Monastery was constructed in 1447 by Gendun Drubpa, the first Dalai Lama. The monastery later saw large-scale expansions and now covers an area of 300,000 m². In addition to a 27-m statue of the Maitreya Buddha, the monastery is also famed for its Grand Hall, with its opulent tomb of the fourth Panchen Lama. The murals and other religious and artistic treasures have long been a popular destination with tourists.

## Nanjing Builds World's Largest City Park

Nanjing is building the world's largest urban park. The fifth-phrase of construction is now underway. When finished, it will integrate five scenic spots into one landscape zone.

In addition, the project also includes building boulevards and clearing the city moat. The project is expected to quicken the pace of urbanization of the outskirts of the city. The park will not only provide a beautiful backdrop for cultural and recreational activities, but also help relieve traffic and improve the local environment.

## Visa-Free Access to Japan for HK Residents

**Hong Kong** Under the new arrangement, effective April 1, 2004, Hong Kong citizens holding HKSAR passports may visit Japan for up to 90 days without a visa.

Visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders is the result of several years of discussions between Hong Kong and Japanese officials. Including Japan, 129 countries and territories have now agreed to grant HKSAR passport holders visa-free access.

Last year, about 480,000 Hong Kong residents visited Japan, making Hong Kong one of the top five sources of visitors to the country.

## Public Complaints over Airlines Publicised for First Time

**China** The General Administration of Civil Aviation for the first time publicised a list of airline companies that received complaints from passengers in 2003.

According to the list, China Southern Airlines Group received 102 complaints, Air China 95 complaints, China Eastern Air Group 92 complaints, Hainan Air Group 41 complaints, Xiamen Airlines 7 complaints, Shenzhen Airlines 8 complaints, Shanghai Airlines 7 complaints, Sichuan Airlines 11 complaints and Shandong Airlines 12 complaints.

The move is to urge Chinese airlines to promote service quality. Most complaints were about the lateness of scheduled flights, alteration of flights at will and mismanagement of luggage transportation.

## New Travel Line on Yangtze River

**[illegible]** The world's longest travel-themed navigation line opened in March between Chongqing and Shanghai.

Linking more than 70 renowned tourist destinations scattered along the Yangtze River including the "Ghost City" of Fengdu, Shennongjia forest, the ancient war fields of the Three Kingdoms period and Zigui City, Hubei Province, the travel line begins at Chongqing and ends at Shanghai via Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui and Jiangsu Provinces.

The route covers 2,400 km and takes 15 days between Chongqing and Shanghai. The cruise will depart from Chongqing on the first and 16th day of each month and return from Shanghai on the 9th and 24th.

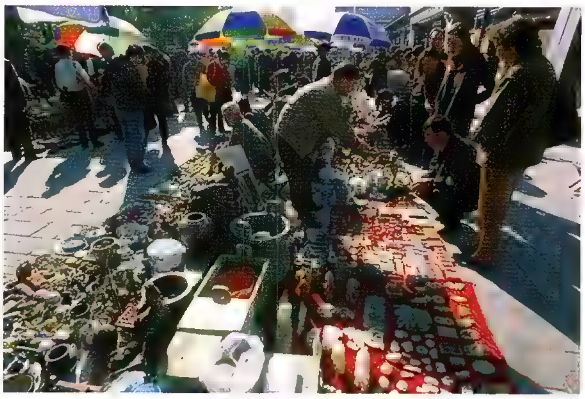
Liberation Monument, Chongqing

## Beijing Takes Precautions Following Park Accident

**Beijing** Beijing's tourism authorities have urged local hotels to make a thorough safety inspection on scenic spots in the city to limit the number of tourists.

The order was issued after a stampede that took place in February when over 30,000 tourists visited a lantern show in a park in Miyun County in the northern suburbs. The accident left 37 people dead and 24 others injured.

The municipal tourism administration also requires working staff at scenic spots to make necessary plans and preparations to evacuate tourists in the event of an accident. Meanwhile, the municipal administration of commerce has demanded measures be worked out to prevent emergencies in such places as shopping malls. Authorities must duly approve large gatherings such as sales promotions in order to prevent traffic jams, spread of diseases and injuries.



## Air Service Links Guangzhou and Munich

**Guangzhou** Lufthansa German Airlines has launched a service of five weekly flights in February between Munich of southern Germany and Guangzhou.

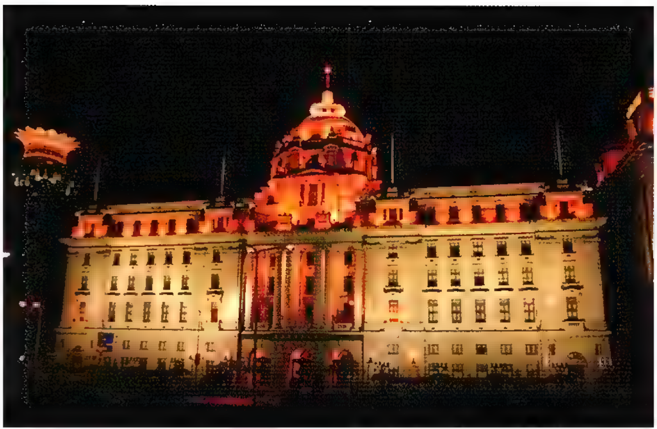
Guangzhou has thus become the group's fourth destination in China, after Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. The flights will shuttle between Guangzhou and Munich each week, with a stopover in Shanghai. All the flights will use Airbus A340-300s, and they will take about ten hours.

## Future Direct Shanghai-Copenhagen Flights

[illegible] As the second Northern European airline after Finnair targetting China's business centre, Scandinavian Airlines will initially make the journey between Shanghai and Copenhagen three times weekly on Airbus A340 planes.

At present, 70% of its passengers are foreign while 30% are Chinese.

China Eastern Airlines, one of China's three pillar carriers, will also open three weekly flights to London in April, flights to Vancouver in June and Moscow in July.


Pudong Development Bank, Shanghai

## Air Macao's New Route between Shenzhen and Taipei

[illegible] Air Macao opened a new passenger flight route linking Shenzhen in south China's Guangdong Province to Taipei City in the island province of Taiwan via Macao on March 9.

The twice-daily service on the new route cuts the flight journey between the two cities by half. Otherwise, passengers leaving Guangdong for Taiwan would have to take land or ferry transportation to the Macao International Airport or to Hong Kong before getting on a plane.

The flights, each taking two hours and 55 minutes, take off at 8:55 am and 4:30 pm daily.

## 12 Countries Expect to be Approved Destinations

Shanghai With local travel agencies and tourism officials predicting China will allow domestic tour groups to visit 12 European Union countries as of May 1, European booths were crowded when the 2004 Shanghai World Travel Fair opened in February. The trade fair, the first of what is scheduled to be an annual event, was held at the Shanghai New International Expo Center.

The 12 countries include Spain, France, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. Currently, domestic tour groups are only approved to visit 28 countries, including Germany, Thailand and Australia.

Marieke Reichwein, a consultant for the Netherlands Tourism Bureau, said her country would offer local travel agencies training and information about popular tourism sites. Spain's Adalucia Tourism Board has spent the past 18 months researching China's tourism market. "Chinese tourists are interested in food, flamenco dance and history more than basking on the beach," said Federico Miro Vazquez, an ATB official.

Several EU countries planned to set up tourism offices in China to deal with the possible avalanche of Chinese visitors.

Munich, Germany

## 3 International Routes for Shenyang

[illegible] Under the approval of the General Administration of Civil Aviation, starting from late March, three international air routes have opened from Shenyang to three cities abroad, Frankfurt, Los Angeles, and Sydney.

Passengers to travel on those three international air routes may clear up customs procedures and check luggage at the Customs of Shenyang. They no longer need to claim their luggage at the transfer stop, Beijing, which is as convenient as on domestic routes.

In the meantime, the three air routes also provide passengers with most possibilities for their next-step trips since the destination cities of the three air routes, Frankfurt, Los Angeles and Sydney, are all air pivots of the three continents of Europe, North America and Oceania. Opening of the three international air routes is predicted to play positive roles in facilitating trade and friendly cooperation between Liaoning and the world.

# Icy Fairyland

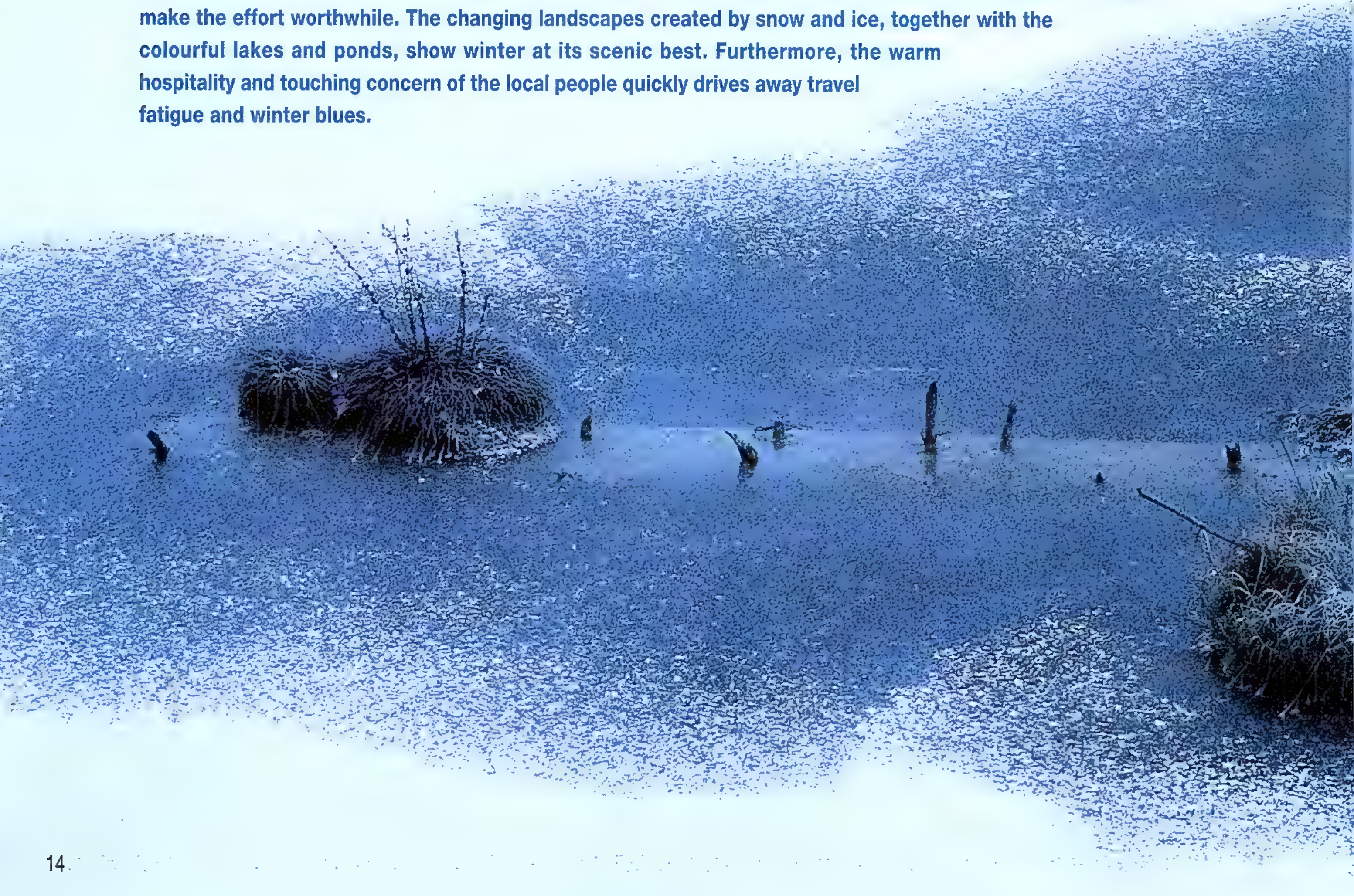
## Unveiling the Frosty Beauty of Jiuzhaigou and Songpan

*Photos by Li Jie, Yu Ning, Chan Yat Nin, Li Rong, Dianna Lau*
*Article by Dianna Lau*

**Travelling through the snow-white beauty of winter is not as romantic as most people would imagine — especially for backpackers.**

**Many hesitate at the thought, given the reality that one has to wear thick, warm clothes, carry heavy equipment and be prepared for drastic weather changes.**

**However, despite the hardship, places such as Jiuzhaigou (Nine Village Valley), Huanglong and Songpan make the effort worthwhile. The changing landscapes created by snow and ice, together with the colourful lakes and ponds, show winter at its scenic best. Furthermore, the warm hospitality and touching concern of the local people quickly drives away travel fatigue and winter blues.**



Islands in the ice (By Li Jie)

The beautiful Shuzheng Lake churns through the frost. The last week of October is the best time for taking pictures of the first snow of the year. (By Yu Ning)

Winter falls on Chang (Long) Lake (By Yu Ning)

# Jiuzhaigou and Songpan's Travel Journal

九寨沟
JIUZHAIGOU

**Day 1**

20°C HK → Chengdu 6°C

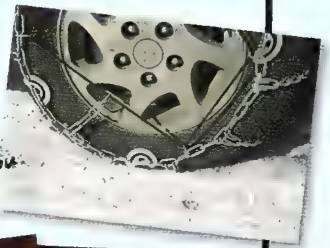
$2,390

24hr 15min

Chengdu $\xrightarrow[¥410]{40\text{min}}$ Jiuzhai

Splendid!

Huanglong Airport (3,440m) $\xrightarrow[¥45]{2\text{hr}}$ Jiuzhaigou -8°C



Slippery!

**Day 2**

Entrance Fee (¥100)

7hr → ¥70

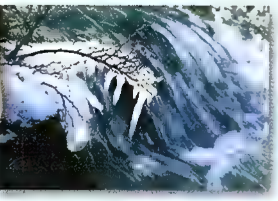
★ Best Travelling Time 9 – 16:00

Nine Palaces

**Day 3**

Encore! (¥40)

All-you-can-eat ¥25



7hr → ¥70

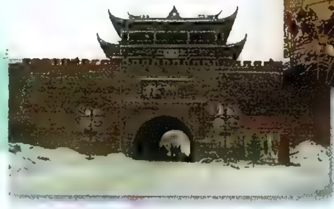
Photo re-take ^^

Local wine ¥35-45

Cowboy hat ¥80

**Day 4**

Jiuzhaigou $\xrightarrow[¥25]{2\frac{1}{2}\text{hr}}$ Songpan



High tea time

-3°C

Yeehaaa!!

**Day 5~6**

Songpan $\xrightarrow[¥100/\text{day}]{2\text{days}}$ Virgin Forest

**Day 7**

Songpan $\xrightarrow[¥150/\text{day}]{1\frac{1}{2}\text{hr}}$ Huanglong

-3°C

Beef jerky ¥12-20

Tibetan shops in Chengdu

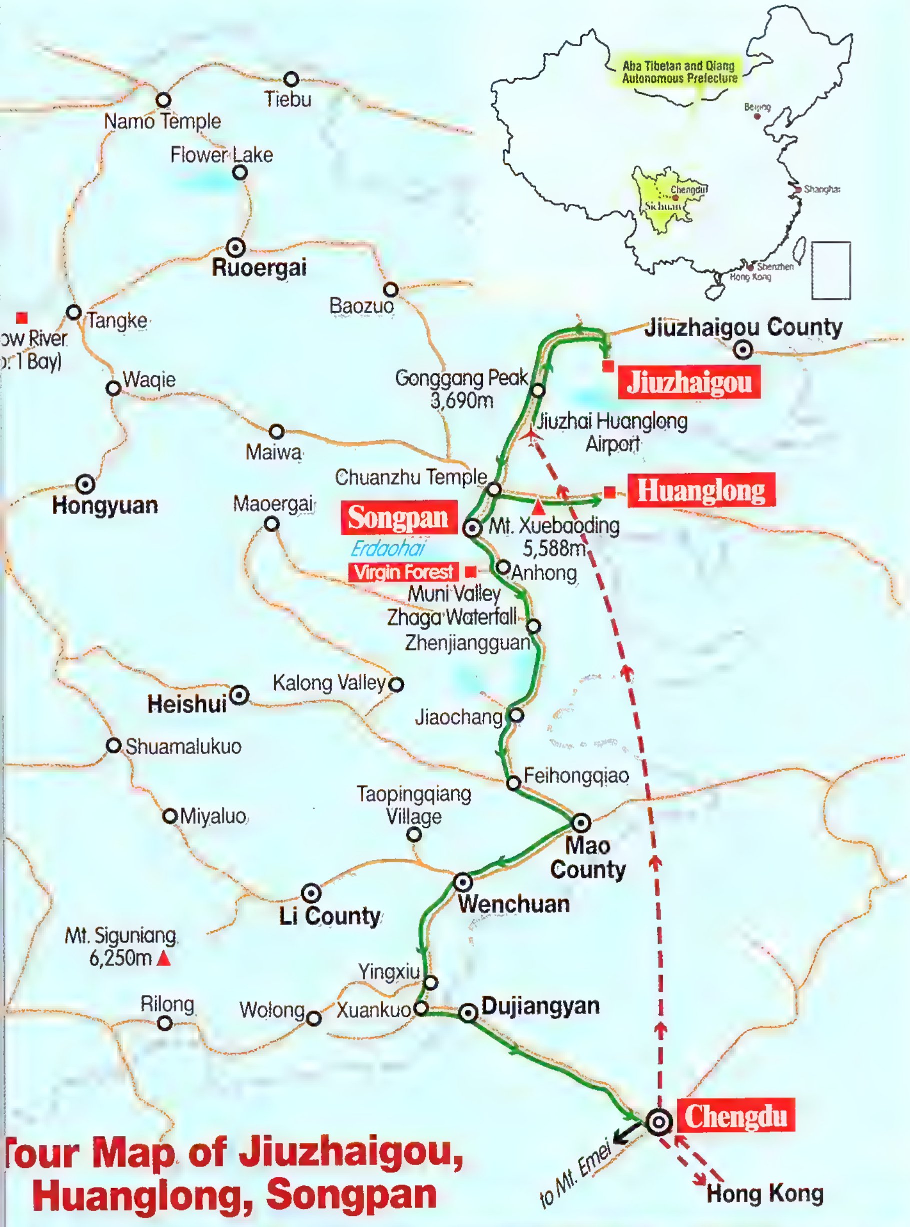
**Day 8**

Songpan $\xrightarrow[¥50]{7\text{hr}}$ Chengdu

**Day 9**

Chengdu $\xrightarrow[\$2,390]{}$ HK

Good Food ^^


Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture
Beijing
Chengdu
Sichuan
Shanghai
Shenzhen
Hong Kong
Tiebu
Namo Temple
Flower Lake
Ruoergai
Baozuo
Tangke
ow River
o: 1 Bay)
Waqie
Gonggang Peak
3,690m
Jiuzhaigou County
Jiuzhaigou
Jiuzhai Huanglong Airport
Maiwa
Hongyuan
Maoergai
Chuanzhu Temple
Huanglong
Songpan
Mt. Xuebaoding
5,588m
Erdaohai
Virgin Forest
Anhong
Muni Valley
Zhaga Waterfall
Zhenjiangguan
Kalong Valley
Heishui
Jiaochang
Shuamalukuo
Feihongqiao
Taopingqiang Village
Miyaluo
Mao County
Li County
Wenchuan
Mt. Siguniang
6,250m
Yingxiu
Rilong
Wolong
Xuankuo
Dujiangyan
Chengdu
to Mt. Emei
Hong Kong

## Tour Map of Jiuzhaigou, Huanglong, Songpan

### Average Temperatures (°C) at Different Altitudes (m)

[illegible]

### Alternative:

[illegible]

## Itineraries:

* (US $1 dollar ~ RMB ¥8 yuan)

### Day 1-3

- Hong Kong/Shenzhen/Guangzhou - Chengdu (air): Several flights a day, from morning to evening. Flights from other major Chinese cities to Chengdu are also available.
- Chengdu-Jiuzhaigou (air): Three flights a day (8:10, 11:30, 14:30). One-way ticket: 410 yuan*. Journey: 40 minutes. (Flights may cancel due to unstable winter condition, and passengers may have to change to long-distance buses.)
- Chengdu-Jiuzhaigou (long-distance bus): Shuttle buses leave the Chadianzi Passenger Bus Station (8:40) and Chengdu Tourist Bus Centre (8:00) every morning. Fare: 95 yuan. Journey: 10 hours.
- Jiuzhai-Huanglong Airport-Jiuzhaigou: An airport shuttle is available after every arrival. Fare: 45 yuan. Journey: two hours.

**Accommodation** (author's pick):

- **Hehua (Lotus) Guesthouse:** Located at the entrance to the scenic area and managed by the Jiuzhaigou Scenic Area Administration. Tel: (837) 7735555. Standard room (with air conditioner): 260 yuan in slow season. Special features: Close to the scenic area; sauna, herbal bath and massage provided.
- **Jiuzhai Huayuan (Garden) Hotel:** It is located in Pengfeng Town, 10 minutes walk from the scenic area. Tel: (837) 7735766. Standard room (with air conditioner): 100 yuan in slow season. Special features: Close to the scenic area; a family inn with many restaurants and shops in the neighbourhood.
- **Jiuzhaigou International Hotel:** It is 20 minutes walk from the entrance to the scenic area. Tel: (837) 7739988. Standard room (with air conditioner): 460 yuan in slow season. Special features: a luxury five-star hotel, with live performaces, sauna, entertainment facilities, as well as Internet service.

**Dining out:** In addition to eating at your hotel (remember to note the restaurant's opening times), you can either find a restaurant in Pengfeng Town or on the street behind the Jiuzhaigou International Hotel.

**Shopping:** You can buy local products such as qingke wine, dried yak meat, herbal products and local crafts in Pengfeng Town or in shops near the Jiuzhaigou International Hotel. You can negotiate with the sellers, but prices are usually reasonable.

**Internet Service:** It is available in the Jiuzhaigou International Hotel, and costs 10 yuan per hour.

### Day 4

- Jiuzhaigou-Songpan (bus): Two scheduled buses are available, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Fare: 25 yuan. Journey: two and a half hours. I boarded a bus setting off at 7:30 a.m., but after running for an hour, the driver said the company might lose money with only four passengers. So he turned back, announcing that the bus would set off again at 13:00. I was lucky to find another bus on the way and continued my journey. Travellers who take a bus should be expected the unexpected.

**Accommodation** (author's pick):

The general conditions in Songpan are rustic in winter. Hotels with air conditioners are closed in this season, but those open provide electric blankets for their guests. Few hotels have individual bathrooms and a bath in the public bathroom can cost up to 5 yuan.

- **Yougen Hotel:** Located by the river at the north gate of the town of Songpan, 10 minutes walk from the Passenger Bus Station. Tel: (837) 7231648. Rate: 20 yuan/person in slow season, single room; 30 yuan (no air conditioner, with electric blanket). Special features: very warm reception.
- **Xingfa Hotel:** Situated opposite the Passenger Bus Station. Rate: 20 yuan/single room in slow season (no air conditioner, with electric blanket). Special features: close to the bus station and convenient for catching an early bus in the morning.
- **Horsemen's homes:** Staying with a horseman's family gives you the opportunity to learn more about the local people and the way they live. Information can be obtained from Mr. Mai Tianyin: (837) 7231216. Rate: 25 yuan/day (including room, food and tour guide).

**Food:** Most of the restaurants in town stay open in winter and you can choose from Tibetan, Muslim, Sichuan or Cantonese cuisine. The food is cheap.

**Shopping:** Songpan is a good place to buy local crafts and souvenirs. There are many shops in town and their prices are reasonable.

**Internet Service:** Internet bars on the street open until midnight. The charge is 3 yuan per hour.

### Day 5-6

The journey continues, but on horseback. In some dangerous sections, such as steep slopes or ice-covered roads, you have to dismount and walk

**Accommodation:** Overnight in the wilderness, with tents and bedding provided by your horseman.

**Food:** Simple fare with Muslim pine cakes or noodles, plus vegetables and meat, and horse tea.

### Day 7

- Songpan-Huanglong (hire a taxi for a day): You can find taxis at the car park in downtown Songpan. It costs 150 yuan a day to hire a taxi, starting at 9 a.m. and arriving in Huanglong one and a half hours later. You'll have five hours to visit the scenic area before returning to Songpan at 6 p.m. Please note that if there is heavy snow and the road is blocked, you'll have to cancel this trip.

**Accommodation and food:** All hotels and restaurants in Huanglong will be closed in winter, so you have to find a place for the night either in Songpan or Chuanzhusi. Don't forget to take your own food while visiting the scenic area.

### Day 8

- Songpan-Chengdu (by bus): There are three scheduled buses from Songpan to Chengdu every morning. Fare: 50 yuan. Journey: seven hours.

**Accommodation:** Suomahua Hotel. 6/F, 81 Zhongnan Street, Chengdu. Tel: (28) 86113500. Standard room (with air conditioner): 100 yuan in slow season. Special features: close to the passenger bus station and airport bus station; free Internet service.

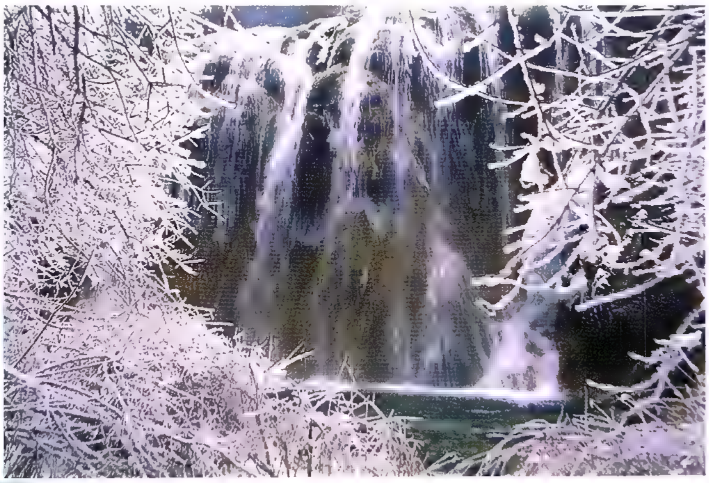
**Food:** Too many choices to describe.

### Day 9

- Return, following the same route.

# Winter Wandering in Jiuzhaigou

**Two reasons took me to Jiuzhaiguo in winter. First, having travelled many times to Jiuzhaiguo in other seasons, I was curious about the winter scenery. Second, the Huanglong Airport in Jiuzhaiguo was opened last September, offering a 40-minute flight to replace the usual 10-hour toil on bumpy roads. I wanted to see it from the air.**



Late December is virtually the "lowest" of the low season in Jiuzhaiguo. The small commercial flight from Chengdu to Jiuzhaiguo was occupied by a mere handful of passengers.

Not until the astonishing mountain chain outside the window had gobbled up a roll of film did I nibble the snacks distributed by the stewardess. At last, it landed in what seemed to be a fairyland.

## Warm Welcome in the Cold Climate...

A -8°C cold breeze welcomed me at the airport. I was well-prepared and wearing suitable clothing. Confident, I stepped out of the airport, located at 3,440 m above sea level. (The other two airports located at higher altitudes are Bangda Airport in Changdu, Tibet, at 4,500 m, and Gonggar Airport in Lhasa, at 3,569 m)

The counters in the arrival hall were selling coach tickets (45 yuan one way) to Jiuzhaiguo. The departure of the buses was conveniently stacked according to the arrival of flights. As a snowstorm hit the day before my arrival, the whole area was white. With snow chains on tires, the coach slowly pulled out and hit the road. Two hours later, it arrived at the terminal (a half-hour walk from the scenic area). When the driver learnt that I lived in the guesthouse at the entrance to the scenic area, he kindly gave me a ride there. However, he refused to take any tips as I got off.

## Heaven and Earth

When I reached the scenic region, it was already afternoon. With the daylight dimming, I ditched the idea of venturing into the area. Instead, I spent the day resting and looking around at the outlying area.

What I saw was so different from that of three years ago in summer — like the contrast between heaven and earth. Strolling down from the hotel for 10 minutes, I arrived in Pengfeng Town, where I had stayed previously. At length, I managed to find the guesthouse where I had stayed, but all other aspects of the town seemed totally strange. Guesthouses, restaurants and nightclubs of all sizes had mushroomed along the alleys and roads. It was hard to imagine what the hustle and bustle would be like at peak season. Taxicabs were abundant too. I learnt from the taxi drivers that they would soon lose their jobs, as the area would be zoned exclusively for coaches.

Despite the few restaurants and shops open in the low season, making the visit rather inconvenient, I still preferred tranquility to tumult. I roamed at length, leaving a hodgepodge of footprints on the early snow. As the twilight came near, I headed back to the guesthouse, looking forward to dinner.

## Powerless in the Night...

"Blackout!" the guesthouse attendant shouted in the dark, announcing there was a blackout across the region. Out of the restaurant streamed a swarm of people. "Is there anything to eat?" "Oh, the restaurant is closed." "Any hot water for making instant noodles?" "There's no power, so how we can boil water?" Wordless, I cast a glance at my watch: it was only 6:15 p.m. Having waited patiently for a half hour for the lights to come back on, to no avail, I went to the tuck shop for a cup noodle. Finally, a staff member managed to fetch me a little hot water. At least I had something warm in my stomach.

Back in my room, a chill crept into the darkness. I had almost forgotten it was -8°C during the day. "There's no power, so how can we have heating?" I murmured to myself, imitating the tone of the attendant. I got my torch out, so I could read. In no time, the beam suddenly "ran out of breath" as if it had caught acute mountain sickness. Then I remembered: batteries burn out quickly in low temperatures.

No choice, I hit the sack early. Since it was freezing cold, I put on all the clothes I had, and covered myself with any blankets in the room — so burdened that I could hardly breathe. With the groans of my still half-empty stomach and the toil of the day, I fell into a sound sleep. When the sunlight warmed me in the morning, I woke up, only to find that I had slept for 12 hours.

**1. Long Lake decorated by early snow (By Yu Ning)**
**2. Waterfall at Zhenzhu (Pearl) Bay in snow (By Li Dan)**
**3. With fewer tourists in winter, the vendors selling ethnic costumes were just killing time (By Dianna Lau)**

3

# Winter Wandering in Jiuzhaigou

## Finding Company...

Travelling to Jiuzhaiguo in summer and in winter are two strikingly different experiences. Visiting Jiuzhaiguo in winter was constrained by two aspects. Firstly, there are very few travellers there and most of them come in groups. As such, independent travellers are somewhat forced to join the majority, and the tour becomes less flexible. Secondly, the short daytime makes photography very challenging.

The sun rises at about 8 a.m. in winter Jiuzhaiguo. I wolfed down my breakfast quickly in the guesthouse and then took off. Living near the entrance of the scenic area made things easier: it took only two minutes to get in. Having bought a map at the front door (maps, scarves and gloves were sold cheaply), I darted toward the scenic area.

The ticket inspector told me that it was best to start before 9 a.m. Vast itself, most of the scenic areas could be roughly visited from the morning till 4 p.m., if you opted for the tour route of the environment-friendly coaches. The later you got in, the more you had to rush through. Basically, no one would enter the area after noon.

Once I got inside, a coach was ready to leave. On board, I showed the ticket with the others: one group from Taiwan, one group from Singapore, two tourists from Guangdong. When the coach was full, it departed. With a big grin, a guide in Tibetan costume introduced the scenery and history of the region. Afterwards, with a serious look, she announced, "Everybody, remember, the car number is 177. Today, you're supposed to follow this car. To avoid inconveniencing others, don't wander off." I felt something was wrong and thought I might have taken some tour group coach by mistake. I consulted the guide. She explained that during low season, when there were few tourists, individual travellers would be arranged to travel with the groups to save resources and ensure the safety of visitors. It made sense, I thought. Yet, in the high season, coaches departed every two minutes, and visitors could jump in and out as they pleased.

## Missing the Bus...

It looked as if I "willingly" accepted the arrangement, yet subconsciously I was struggling with it. When the coach halted at the first stop, Lao Hu (Tiger) Beach, the guide said, "Now, you have half an hour to look around. Please be back on time." Half an hour? Was she kidding? I eyed the elderly in the coach, thinking they probably would walk slowly, and that might grant me 15-minute leeway. That should be enough, I thought, and off I went with my camera.

This scenic spot was not that big. Seeing the snow-covered path and frosted branches on the streams for the first time, however, gave me a real thrill. I snapped away continuously and lost track of time totally. Other tourists had long gone. All of a sudden, a familiar face dashed toward me from afar. Grabbing his breath, he said, "Madam, why are you still here? All others have gone to the next stop already. Did you not listen to the instructions?" It turned out he was the driver of coach 177. With his passengers dropped at the next station, he rushed back to fetch me. I followed him to get back to the coach, with a pang of "guilt". The others have already finished visiting the second spot. Eyes wide open, I could only say farewell to the magnificent Shuzheng waterfall in the car.

## A Flying Tour...

When we reached the magnificent Nuorilang Waterfall, perfect sunlight was beaming through. Exhilarated, I had my camera ready to jump off. To my dismay, the coach passed it without stopping. Our guide announced that we would stop by on our way back in the afternoon. We had to follow the itinerary of the Rize Scenic area.

Due to conservation of the woodland, a few places, such as the Yuanshi (Virgin) Forest, Tian-E (Swan) Lake, and Cao (Reed) Lake, were closed in winter. Our coach drove along Jianzhu (Arrow Bamboo) Lake, stopping at every scenic spot: 10 minutes for Arrow Bamboo Lake; 15 minutes for the frozen Xiongmao (Panda) Lake; 20 minutes for the magnificent Wuhua (Five Flowers) Lake; 30 minutes for lush Zhenzhu (Pearl) Bay. However, we failed to stop at Jing (Mirror) Lake, with its perfect light and breathtaking reflections. Surprisingly, in spite of such a rushed merry-go-around tour, none of the group uttered the slightest complaint. Some, on the contrary, thought the tour had taken too long. A few even chose to nap or to stay in the coach "window sightseeing". Only the two Guangdong travellers and I were bugged the whole time.

At lunchtime, the driver managed to drop us off at Nuorilang Central Station cafeteria. Our guide, as usual, dutifully announced, "Forty minutes for lunch, and please be back on time!" Even a meal had to be timed, I groaned.

**1. Most travellers to Jiuzhaiguo in winter come as tour groups (By Dianna Lau)**
**2. The frozen Nuorilang Waterfall (By Yu Ning)**
**3. Wintery view of Swan Lake (By Yu Ning)**

## About Jiuzhaigou

### Winter activities:

**Admission:** 145 yuan (100 yuan for the slow season from Nov. 1 to the end of February).

- The discounted re-entry ticket is 40 yuan, except for the week-long public holidays around May 1 and Oct. 1. You can either buy your re-entry ticket together with your first ticket, or show your first ticket.
- Environmentally friendly shuttle buses in the scenic area: 90 yuan for ordinary days and 70 yuan in slow season; there are no discounts.
- A bus ticket is necessary because the scenic area is very big and it's convenient to take the bus from one spot to another, especially in winter.
- If you buy your bus ticket inside the scenic area, you'll be charged 50 yuan more as a handling fee.
- Bus dispatch offices are located at the entrance to the scenic area and Nuorilang. They also offer help and information.

**Smoking:** Except for the restaurants, smoking is not allowed anywhere in the area. The fine for violation is 500 yuan.

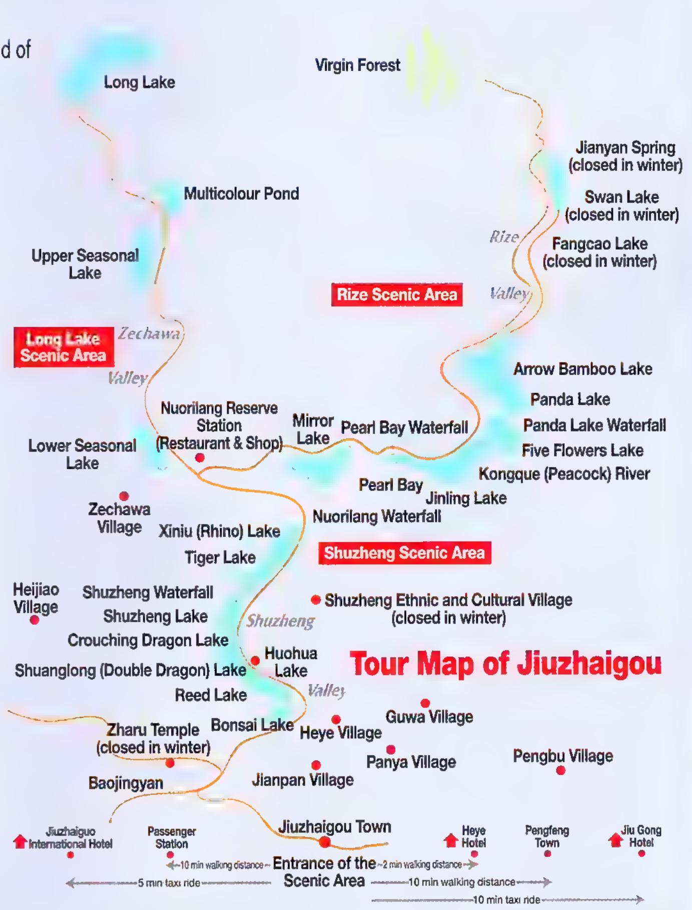
**Accommodation:** Visitors are not allowed to stay in the scenic area for the night.

**Food:** There is a cafeteria at Nuorilang. You should buy your ticket on the ground floor (25 yuan/person) and go upstairs to choose from more than 10 dishes, including rice and steamed buns. Opening times depend on the flow of visitors. In winter, it usually offers lunch only and service may end after 1:30 p.m. So it's wise to bring some food.

**Lavatories:** WCs are available at all scenic spots. They are clean, but may be dark when the door is closed.

**Shopping:** There are many stalls selling tourist products and gifts outside the scenic area with long service times. Such shops are also found at the Nuorilang cafeteria at lunchtime.

*All the trails near Nuorilang are closed in the winter


**Tour Map of Jiuzhaigou**
Long Lake
Virgin Forest
Jianyan Spring (closed in winter)
Swan Lake (closed in winter)
Multicolour Pond
Rize
Fangcao Lake (closed in winter)
Upper Seasonal Lake
Rize Scenic Area
Valley
Long Lake Scenic Area
Zechawa
Valley
Arrow Bamboo Lake
Panda Lake
Nuorilang Reserve Station (Restaurant & Shop)
Mirror Lake
Pearl Bay Waterfall
Panda Lake Waterfall
Lower Seasonal Lake
Five Flowers Lake
Kongque (Peacock) River
Pearl Bay
Jinling Lake
Zechawa Village
Nuorilang Waterfall
Xiniu (Rhino) Lake
Tiger Lake
Shuzheng Scenic Area
Heijiao Village
Shuzheng Waterfall
Shuzheng Ethnic and Cultural Village (closed in winter)
Shuzheng Lake
Shuzheng
Crouching Dragon Lake
Huohua Lake
Shuanglong (Double Dragon) Lake
Reed Lake
Valley
Guwa Village
Zharu Temple (closed in winter)
Bonsai Lake
Heye Village
Panya Village
Pengbu Village
Baojingyan
Jianpan Village
Jiuzhaigou Town
Jiuzhaiguo International Hotel
Passenger Station
Heye Hotel
Pengfeng Town
Jiu Gong Hotel
10 min walking distance
Entrance of the Scenic Area
2 min walking distance
5 min taxi ride
10 min walking distance
10 min taxi ride

# Winter Wandering in Jiuzhaigou

## Out of Tune

Almost all the tourists that day came in tour groups, a total of about hundred people. We lined up orderly for a buffet lunch, which was convenient and time-saving. With swarms of tourists dashing in and out, I dared not to stay for long. Instead, I scoffed two steamed buns and left.

Back in the coach, I thought it over and decided to stick to the group, at least, to glimpse all the sites once first. That way I could select some preferred spots and spend more time at them the next day.

I made up my mind: Stop being paranoid, and just relax.

Seeing us in a good mood after lunch, the tour guide suggested that we take turns to sing. I pretended to fall asleep to avoid my turn, but the others seemed to enjoy the singsong much.

When all the jolly singing ended, we reached the very end of the Long Lake scenic region — the highest point at 3,150 m above sea level. Long Lake and Panda Lake, the guide claimed, were both prone to freezing over. Unlike other lakes that stayed fluid year round due to constant currents, these two seas were motionless making them more likely to freeze. The time I visited was not February, the coldest month in Jiuzhaiguo, and the water was still sapphire-like. I, however, failed to snap any masterpieces for the light was dim.

Along Long Lake was the stunning and picturesque Wucai (Multicolour) Pond. Provided the sunlight was right, even an amateur with a simple automatic camera could take splendid postcard photos. The place was close to perfection when decorated with snow.

After two seasons, the lakes had dried up, leaving a thin layer of snow. I could remember when I last came in summer, I sat on the rim of the water, marveling at its greenish glow.

Time flew by; the coach got back to Nuorilang Waterfall again. Everyone went to the lookout pavilion to appreciate the sublime scenery. Yet, without the light, the images lacked depth, and I could only take a few simple pictures.

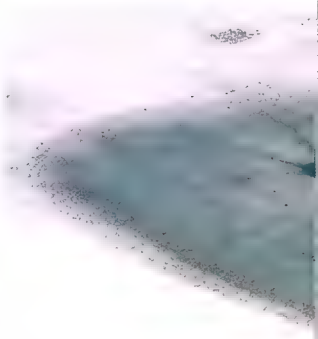
The car finally headed toward the entrance of Shuzheng scenic area. On the way, we passed Reed Lake and Penjing (Bonsai) Bay. Our guide asked if anyone of us wanted to stop and take pictures; yet no one heeded her. With the sky turning gloomy, I saw those scenes flash across the window.

## Going Solo...

The flying visit left me a good idea of where to go and what pictures to take the next day. I wrote an itinerary, accessible by vehicle and by foot: Tiger Lake Waterfall (revisit) → Nuorilang Waterfall (retake photos) → Mirror Lake (retake photos) → Panda Lake (photograph again) → Five Flowers Lake (worth more photos) → Pearl Bay (worth more photos) → Long Lake (retake photos) → Multicolour Pond (worth more photos).

The next morning, I entered the scenic area again taking the coach with another group. I repeated the first part of the tour, with the main focus on Tiger Lake Waterfall. Once we reached Nuorilang Waterfall, I "fled" the group and was free!

Enjoying and photographing the frozen waterfall with sufficient sunlight from the perfect angle was a luxury. Better even, there was no one else. I then toddled off to Nuorilang car park (five-minute walk), the central point of the scenic area, and then to Mirror Lake (20-minute walk). The water of Mirror Lake that day was no longer tranquil, depriving visitors of its mirror effect. The snow on the branches was melting. However, the brighter sunlight turned the water an emerald green. Taking pictures of Jiuzhaiguo was difficult: the light, the action, the colour, and the embellishment all had to match.



With Mirror Lake photographed, I found the snow-coated pine trees on the slope oozing with winter sentiment and decided to hike up. Tripods and camera were then placed for some great shots. By the time I finished, it was 1 p.m. in the afternoon — half an hour before the cafeteria shut. Had I missed it, I would have gone hungry. I hurried to pack my equipment and darted for the cafeteria. Running down the hill under the warm sun and in clumsy winter clothes was a trial. Heavy sweating is a quick way to catch cold (never take off your clothes outdoors too quickly without letting your body adjust first). I made it to the cafeteria on time. Thanks to the swarms of tourists that day, the place was open for an extra half hour.

## A Car to Myself...

After lunch, off I went again. The next destinations were far-off Panda Lake and Multicolour Pond, places that took too much time and toil to walk to. I went to see the drivers in the car park to see if I could get any assistance. The staff member kept me waiting awhile. Then he ruled out the possibility getting a ride with the other coaches, but he agreed to provide me the exclusive use of a vehicle. "The car is just for you today," he beamed. My luck had changed.

Even though I had a car to myself, I did not want to affect or delay the working schedule of the driver. As it was already afternoon, I had to be decisive and swift when taking photos. Every time I stopped, I told the driver how long it would take: ranging from 10 minutes to an hour. Sometimes, he pulled over to let me take a panoramic view from the car window. The driver, every now and then, uttered an expression of perplexity and concern about my safety. We got along well.

The light gave Panda Lake a wonderful icy sheen. It let me record all the interesting patterns on the ice. At Multicolour Pond, I could enjoy its charms as the light changed. Regrettably, I returned 15 minutes later than the time agreed at Pearl Bay (thankfully the driver was understanding); the currents and icicles made the whole site irresistible. At Long Lake, perhaps I upset the sun somehow for it kept

hiding. Nice photos, therefore, eluded me. However, the fascinating Multicolour Pond never disappointed visitors as it offered surprises at all times.

With the pictures of Multicolour Pond taken, it was 3:30 p.m., the usual time for drivers to get back. I headed back as well. As the car passed the Reed Lake and Bonsai Bay, the last rays of sun were still shining. The driver tacitly pulled off, and let me get a few final shots — a perfect final touch to a bountiful trip.

1. **Photographers make the most of the limited time and light (By Dianna Lau)**
2. **Ice floating on Panda Lake (By Dianna Lau)**
3. **Mysterious patterns appear on Panda Lake during winter (By Li Jie)**

## Travel Tips

### Shuttle Bus Routes in Winter:

A route will be arranged for all visitors inside the scenic area so that they can take the same bus. You should be aware that the bus may not stop at all the scenic spots. If you have any requirements, let the tour guide or driver know before the shuttle starts. Or you can ask for help at the dispatch offices at the entrance or Nuorilang. The scenic area will do its best to satisfy customers.

**Basic Bus Route:**

The bus starts at 9 a.m. and returns to the entrance at 4 p.m., giving time for lunch at Nuorilang.

Entrance → Shuzheng Village/Waterfall → Tiger Lake → Arrow Bamboo Lake → Panda Lake → Five Flowers Lake → Pearl Bay → Long Lake → Multicolour Pond → Nuorilang Waterfall → Reed Lake → Entrance

- This was the route I followed when I visited the scenic area last December for your reference.

### Photography Tips:

You should prepare more film than usual as you may enter the scenic area several times and the scenic posts may look different as the weather changes. Temperatures may fall as low as -10°C, but if there is no wind, the weather won't affect the function of your camera. I hung my cameras outside my coat and they worked well. I used only one set of batteries. Still, it's necessary to prepare some extra batteries and, when the temperature is lower, you should be careful to keep your camera warm by putting it in your backpack when you are not using it.

By Guo Ji

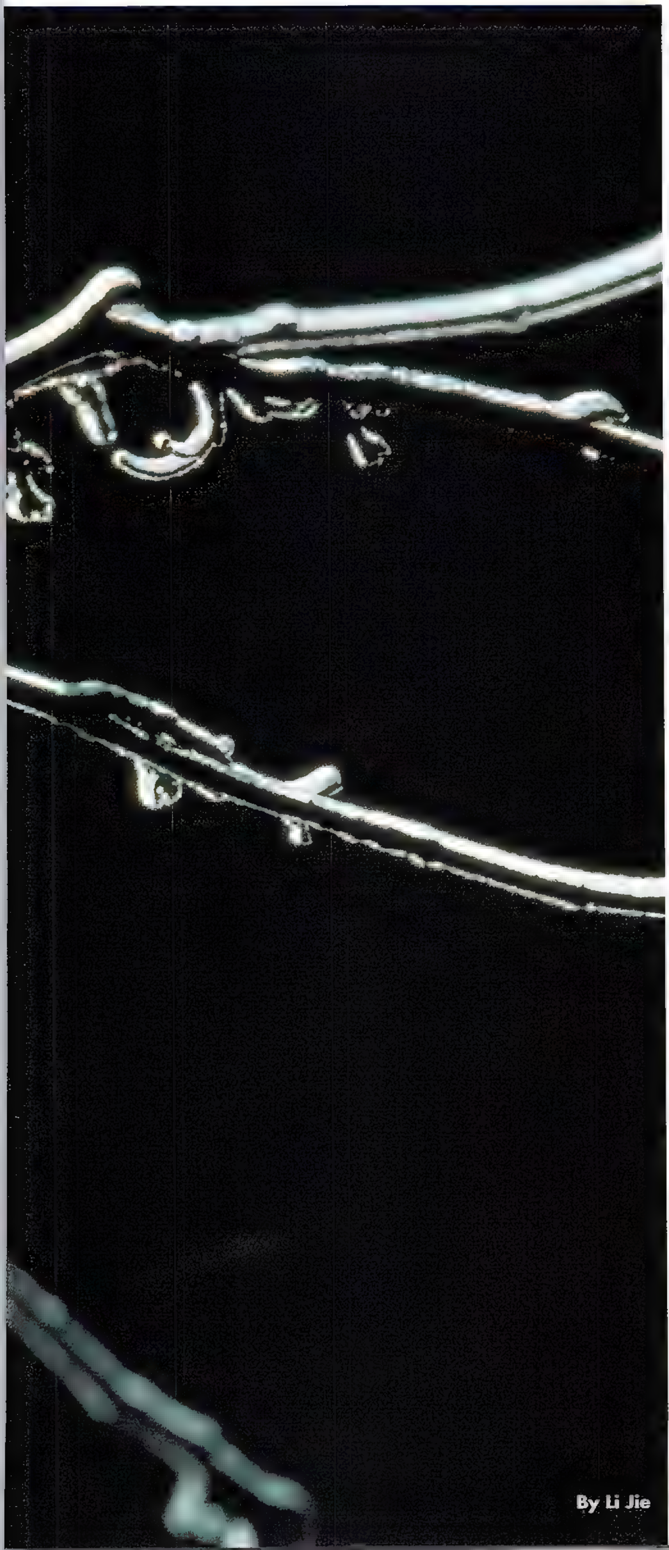
By Chen Jin

By Dianna Lau

# Icy Fairyland

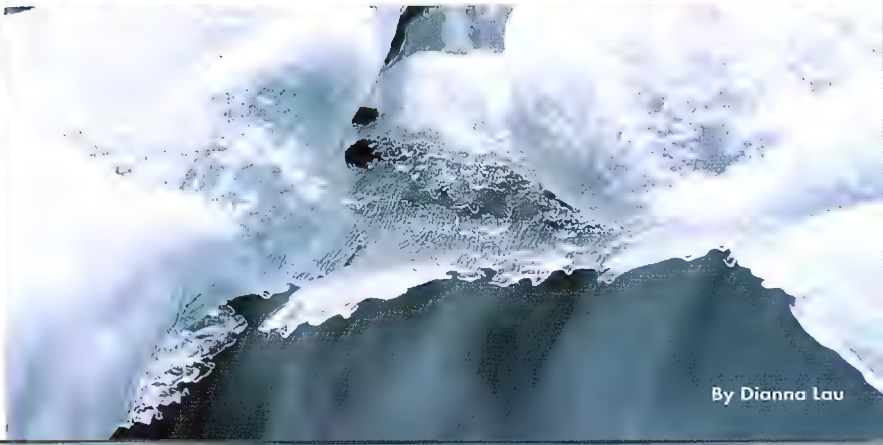
## Unveiling the Frosty Beauty of Jiuzhaigou and Songpan

By Yuan Xuejun


By Li Jie

By Dianna Lau

By Chen Jin


By Dianna Lau

# The Unforgettable Night at the Nine Palaces...

**Apart from its natural beauty, Jiuzhaiguo has a unique cultural heritage as well. The Tibetan and Qiang ethnic minorities embellish the region with their music, dance and costumes.**

Often, you may finish touring the scenic area by 4 p.m. and find the rest of the day in the deserted streets rather dull. As tour groups were visiting in winter, I reckoned there must be nightlife. I asked around — the administrative office of the scenic area, the front desk staff at the hotel, the tour guides. They all offered the same answer: "Go to Jiu Gong (Nine Palaces)."

## An Evening of Culture

I decided to take a look. After dinner, I jumped into a cab and went to Nine Palaces.

Ten minutes later, I was at the front door of Nine Palaces Guesthouse, drawn by its special Tibetan architectural design. It bore a sign for the "Rong Zhong Er Jia Concert Hall". The name was familiar. Wasn't he the famous Tibetan singer who appeared in VCDs, singing the "Majestic Jiuzhaigou"?

The concert hall was indeed opened by Rong Zhong Er Jia, as well as a group of art-lovers with the aim of promoting Tibetan and Qiang music. They aspired to have visitors not only enjoying the beautiful Jiuzhaiguo landscapes, but also the ethnic cultures.

## Tapping into Tibetan dance...

Once in the hall, I was taken aback by the size of the audience. During the day, I ran into a handful of visitors in the scenic area; yet, there were over 200 people in the hall. There was a marked contrast between the heated atmosphere inside and the freezing desolation outside. For the next two hours, the host introduced wonderful performances: the welcoming dance, Tibetan string dance, Tibetan tap-and-kick dance, Qiang holy dance, Qiang shield dance, Qiang mask dance, tug-of-war, a grand Qiang traditional dance, and a grand Tibetan and Qiang costume show. One performance followed another, captivating the audience every minute.

When the handsome Tibetans began the "tap-and-kick dance", they swung and kicked the bells tied around their ankles to the rapid rhythms. I could not help running toward the stage, clapping and cheering with the rest of the audience. It was an authentic Tibetan "tap-and-kick dance", the same as the one I had seen in Yushu, Qinghai province.

## Striking the Right Note...

The singing was first class, every singer was either a winner of a national singing contest, or able to sing, compose, and play instruments all at once. No wonder during the show, the audience streamed up to the stage to present "hada" (a gift piece of silk). The Tibetan and Qiang people were people born to be singers.

As all performers came on stage in their splendid ethnic costumes, the many Tibetan and Qiang ladies stood out. No doubt, they were gifted. As for the men, "handsome" might not be the suitable adjective, but they were definitely powerfully built. When the 2.23-m-tall Tibetan giant dressed in extravagant attire (that cost 500,000 yuan) came out, all other men had to bow before him.

**1. The bedazzling dancers of Nine Palaces (By Chan Yat Nin)**
**2. The 2.23-m-tall Tibetan giant wore a costume that cost about 500,000 yuan (By Dianna Lau)**
**3. The Tibetans were born to be dancers (By Chan Yat Nin)**
**4. The Tibetan tap-and-kick dance thrilled the audience (By Dianna Lau)**

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## Rong Zhong Er Jia Concert Hall

**Where:** At the main entrance of Jiuzhaiguo, next to Jiu Gong Guesthouse.

**Getting there:** Ten-minute taxi ride from scenic area (10 yuan)

**Telephone:** (837) 773 5585

**Admission:** 160 yuan. Tickets are available at most hotels or the ticket office at Jiu Gong (A meal is included: meat jerky, highland barley wine, and special Sichuan tea).

**Time:** In winter (7:30 p.m. to 9:15 p.m.) (Extra shows in peak season)

**Highlights:** The organisers of the troupe went to great lengths to select the best dancers and singers from the Tibetan and Qiang ethnic groups in the area. They receive professional training on entering the troupe. I particularly enjoyed the Tibetan tap-and-kick dance. I also learnt that the Tibetan giant, Shi Danzhen, was formerly a villager loved greatly by his neighbours as he helped out in all their manual labour. Now adorned with jewelry, Shi no longer engages in manual work, but is equally loved by tourists who clamour to take photos with him.

# The Mecca for Photographers

*Photos by Chan Yat Nin, Li Rong Article by Chan Yat Nin*

**For a long time, Jiuzhaigou has been a Mecca for tourists, especially for photographers. A winter trip brings them to a fairyland of ice and snow. People used to throng there in spring, summer and autumn, but few came in winter, for pictures. Now they have discovered that Jiuzhaigou in winter is like a beauty who had always been colourfully dressed suddenly changing into a white dress — looking even more pure and elegant.**

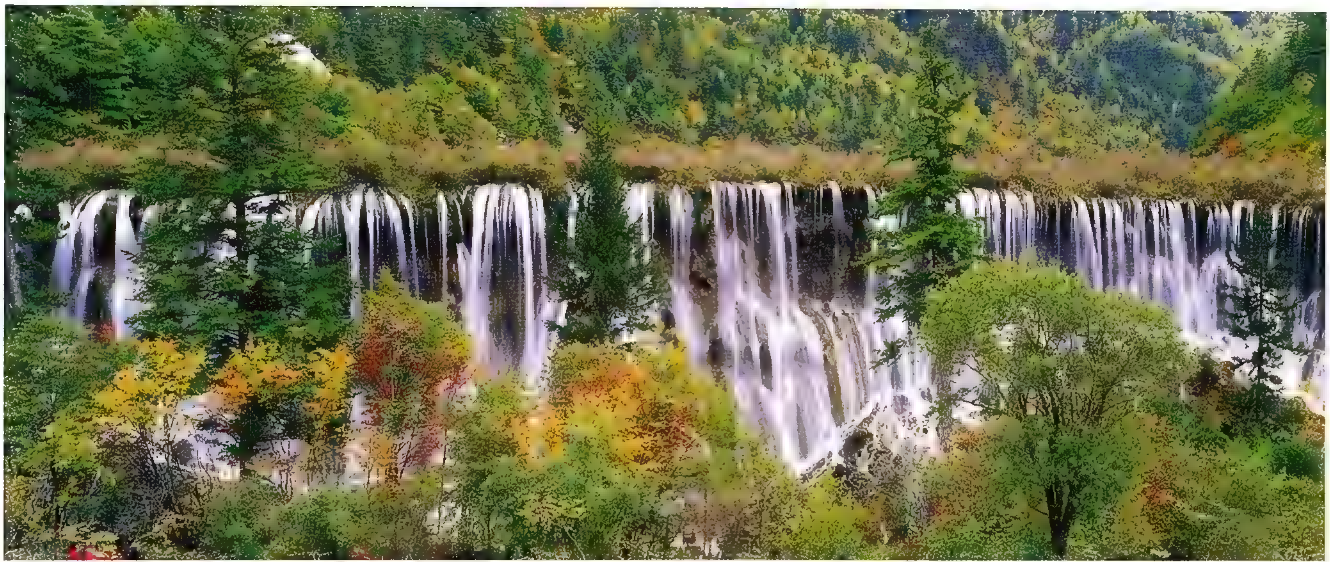
In all four seasons Jiuzhaigou is magnificent. Yet this "fairyland" of foolproof photographic masterpieces leaves many experienced photographers at a loss.

## The Soul of Jiuzhaigou

For an outstanding scenic area like Jiuzhaigou, it is really a challenge to express its beauty through pictures.

Visitors first coming to Jiuzhaigou are very likely to be overwhelmed by its colours. In great excitement, they produce pictures of masses of colours without any artistic conception, which by no means suggests a fairyland. Many come again and again before they are no longer captivated by its superficial colours, when they can think carefully from the perspective of art, and produce good pictures.

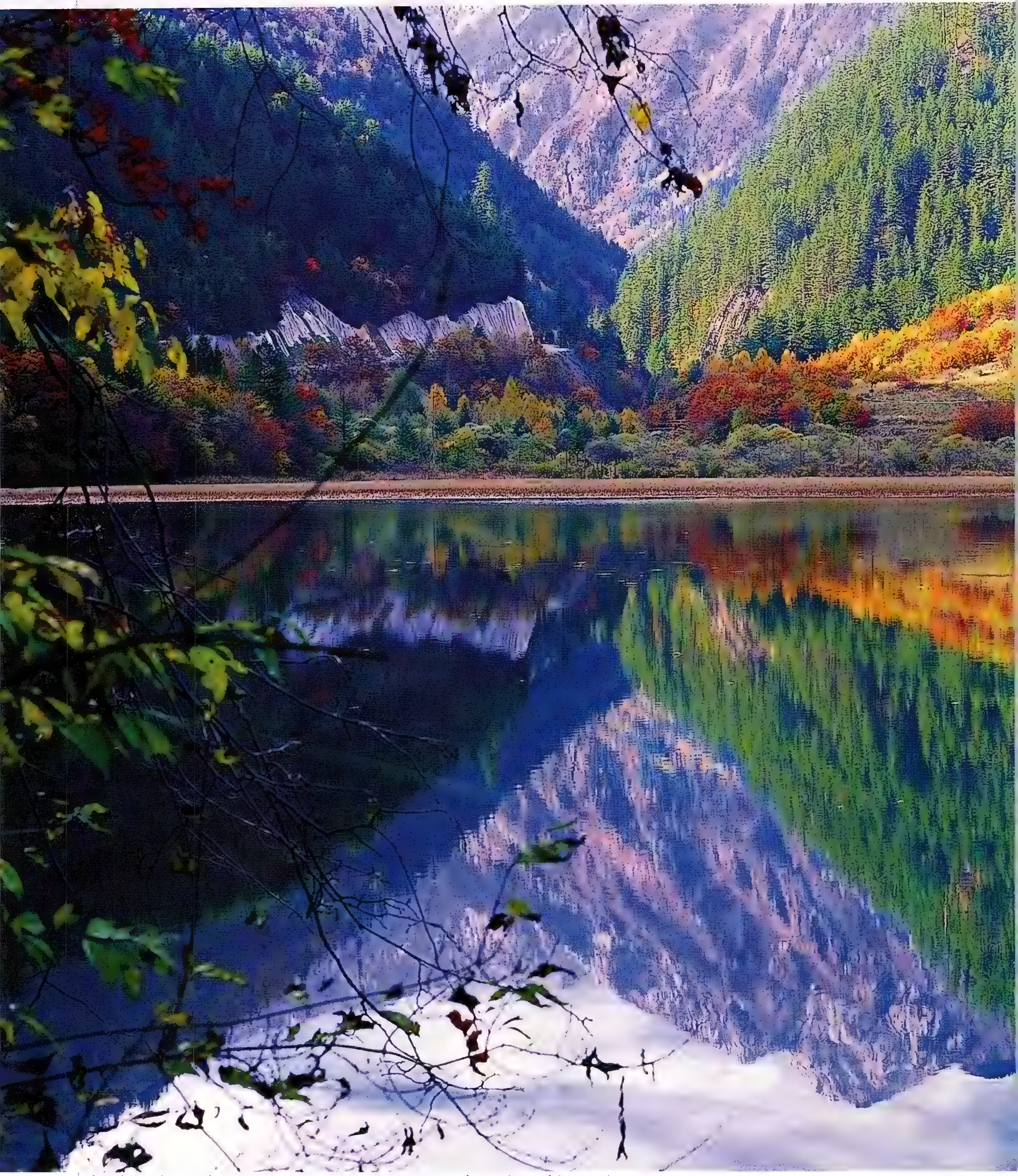
Of course, Jiuzhaigou is most colourful and delightful in autumn. But it is important to note that the ever-changing world of water is the soul of Jiuzhaigou. The mountains and forests become fantastic and



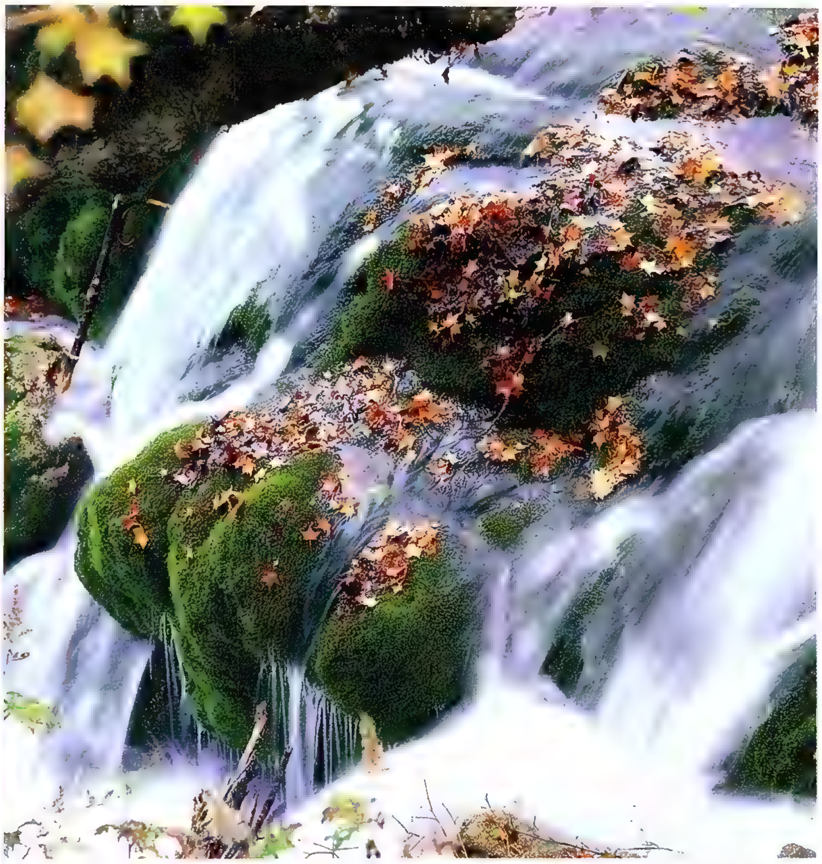
Viewed from above, the colours of the Five Flower Lake appear even more vibrant. Xpan camera, 30mm lens, RVP 50 film with Grade 1 development. (By Chan Yat Nin)

Nuorilang Waterfall. Xpan camera, 90mm zoom, RVP 50 film with Grade 1 development. (By Chan Yat Nin)

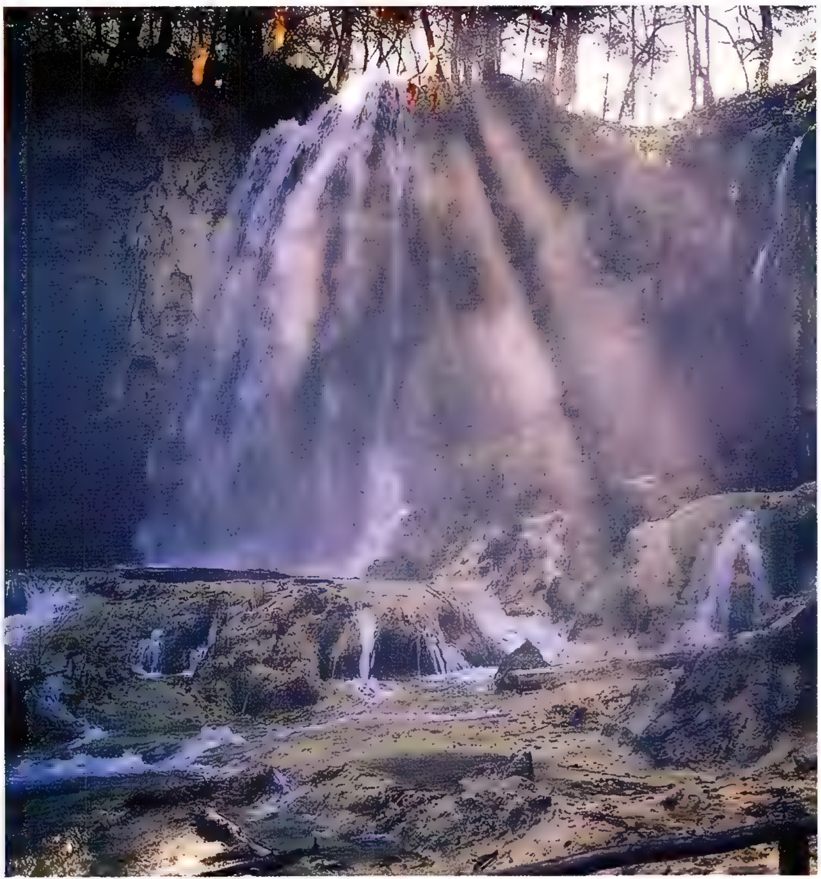
# The Mecca for Photographers



The aptly named Mirror Lake. 6x4.5 (cm), 120 camera, 80mm zoom; aperture: 8; shutter: 1/8 second. (By Li Rong)



Shuzheng Waterfall. A slow shutter speed helps reflect the running water and falling leaves. 6x6 (cm), 120 camera, 250mm zoom. (By Chan Yat Nin)



Panda Waterfall. 6x4.5 (cm), 120 camera, 45mm lens; aperture: 2.8; shutter: 1/3 second. (By Li Rong)

picturesque when they are mirrored in water. So what is most demanding for a good picture of Jiuzhaigou is fitting the mountains and water together.

Jiuzhaigou has many limpid pools and lakes that contain rich calcium carbonate sediments and minerals that present different colours. When the mountains and forests are reflected in calm water, they are excellent picture scenes. But what is most undesirable when taking a picture of a pool bottom is to have reflected light on the surface. To deal with this, the photographer can add a polarised lens to filter the surface light so as to reveal the bottom. The polarised lens is indispensable for a photographer in Jiuzhaigou.

Water in Jiuzhaigou is mostly flowing, like Nuorilang Waterfall and the gurgling waters of Pearl Bay. The best way to present the beauty of water is to use a slow shutter and small diaphragm to make the water look fluid. If the time of exposure is slower than 1/8 second or even several seconds, the water flow in the picture will seem more beautiful than it actually is, thus generating an extraordinary effect. Of course, a tripod is necessary to keep the camera steady when using the slow shutter. There are many wooden paths set up above water. If someone walks by, even the firmest tripod will shake, so the photographer must wait patiently for the tourists to pass before pressing the shutter button.

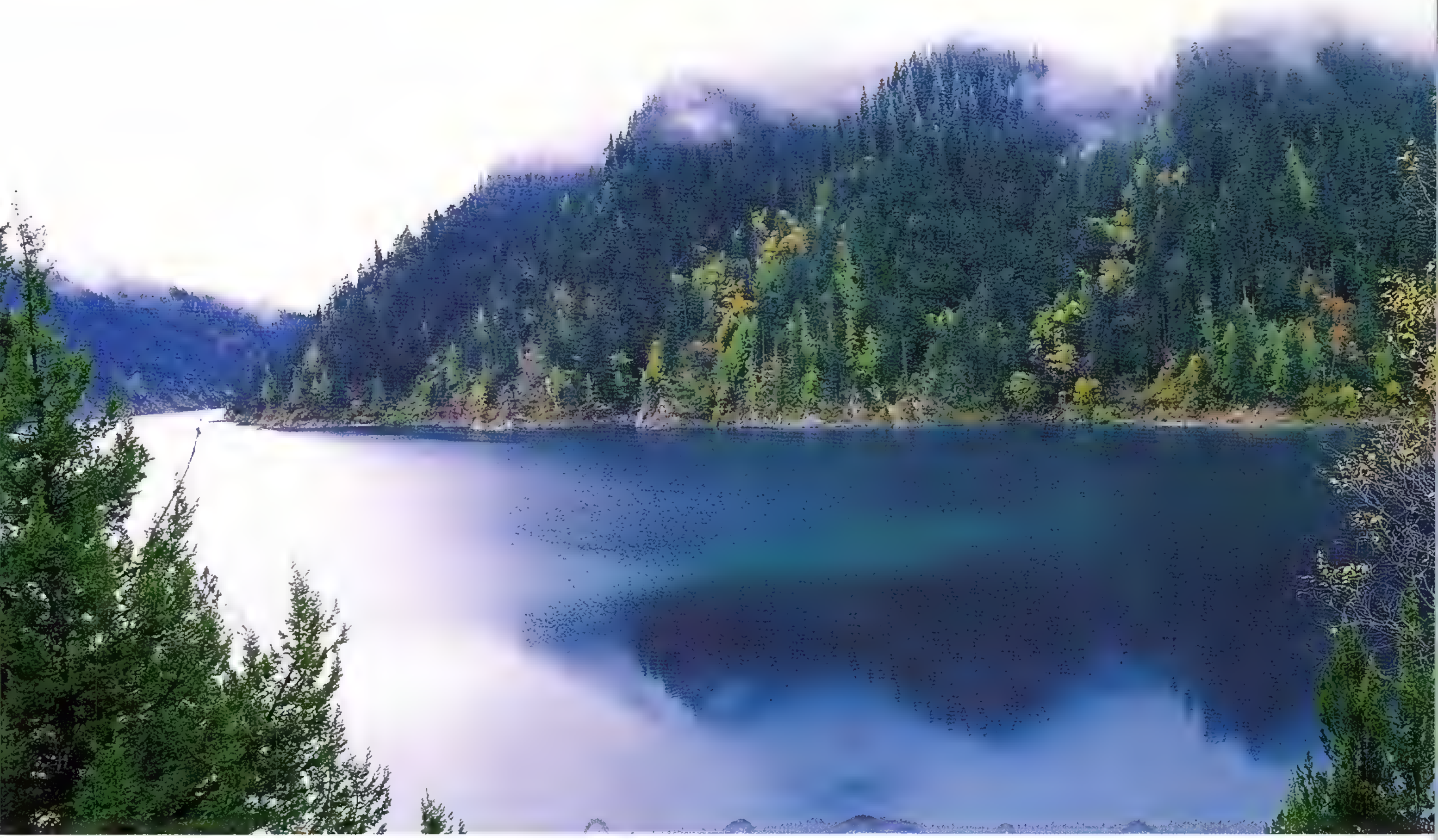
## Seeing the Light

It is generally believed that only bright sunlight can produce good pictures of Jiuzhaigou. But it's not necessarily so. The scenery and tone can look good in sunlight from certain perspective; but in other perspectives the light might seem jumbled and unnecessary. Actually, since the colours in Jiuzhaigou are very bright, the pictures can look clear enough any time in good visibility without sunlight. What's more, the photographer may have more freedom without being restricted by the angle and direction of the light.

As the colours and composition of a picture are directly influenced by the direction of the sunlight, we must be clear of the directions of every valley, forest, lake, pool, waterfall and spring, so as to take pictures at the best possible time.

The experience of many photographers shows the best filming time varies with the three major valleys and their scenic spots in Jiuzhaigou.

**Zechawa Valley:** Take an early bus to the



Long Lake is the largest lake in Jiuzhaigou. Xpan camera, 30mm lens. (By Chan Yat Nin)

farthest Long Lake. Then walk back via the Multicolour Pond and Shangjijie (Upper Seasonal) Lake. Take a bus to the Xiajijie (Lower Seasonal) Lake, Nuorilang Lake, and Nuorilang Waterfall. The Long Lake and Nuorilang Waterfall should be highlighted, as they are good subjects for wide-angle pictures. To photograph Nuorilang Waterfall, you can climb to the saddle of the mountains facing the waterfalls and take pictures downward, so as to have a panoramic view.

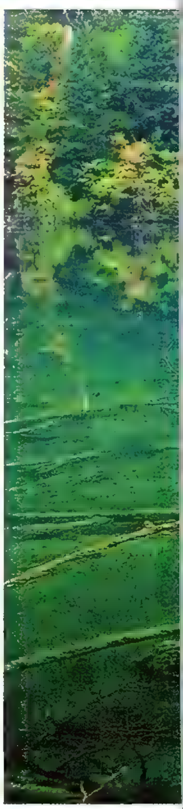
**Shuzheng Valley:** After the Nuorilang Waterfall, you can photograph the neighbouring Shuzheng Valley in the afternoon, highlighting the Shuzheng Waterfall, Shuzheng Lake, Wolong (Crouching Dragon) Lake, and Huohua (Spark) Lake. The best place to photograph the Shuzheng Waterfall is from the highway that looks down at the waterfall. A panoramic camera with wide-angle lens can produce spectacular pictures. Shuzheng Lake, Crouching Dragon Lake and Spark Lake are colourful in autumn. You can either take close-ups by walking on the plank roads between the lakes, or take commanding panoramic views standing by the highway.

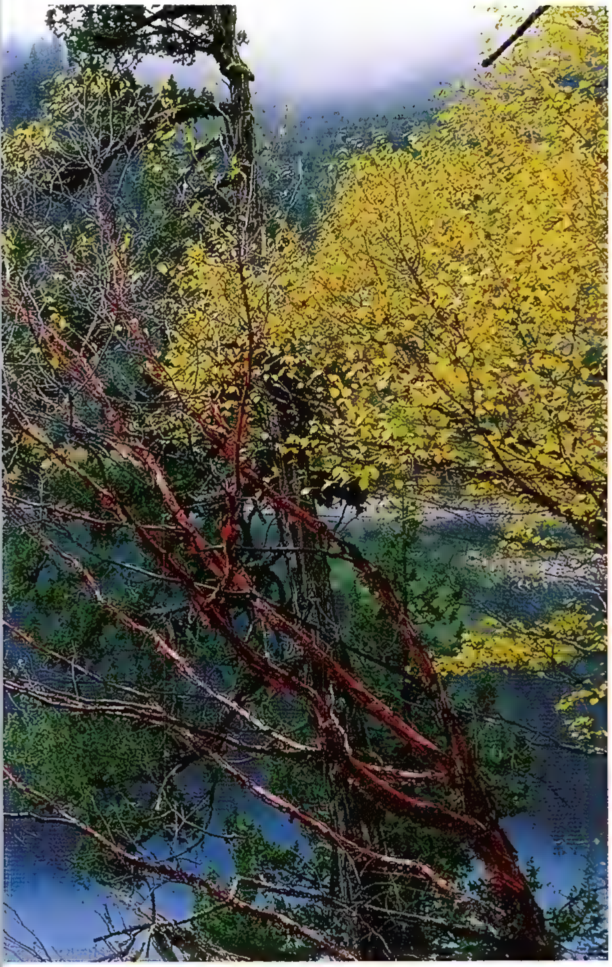
**Rize Valley:** There are many good picture spots that are changeable with the light. The Mirror Lake at the entrance of the valley should be photographed in the early morning, when the surface is as calm as a mirror, the mountains and forests are reflected in water and beautiful plants at the lake bottom visible. But after 9 or 10 a.m., the water surface is broken by the wind and the reflections disappear.

Then you can reach the virgin forest at the farthest end. Then take a bus back to Bamboo Arrow Lake and Panda Lake. Walk on the plank road to photograph the Panda Waterfall, where you can get on the highway. Then photograph the whole Five Flowers Lake, and walk down to the lakeside for close-ups. The Five Flowers Lake, with its resplendent colours, is one of the most charming lakes in Jiuzhaigou.

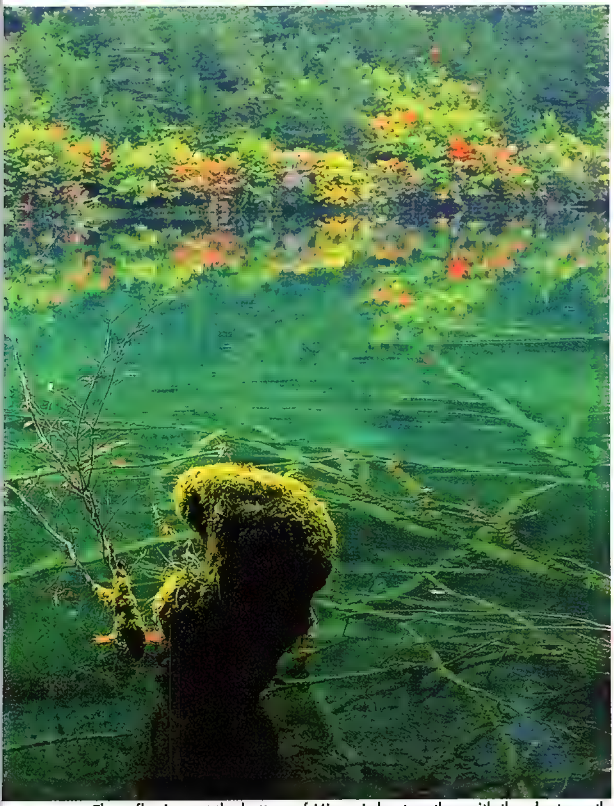
Take a bus then to the Pearl Bay. There are many scenic spots to take pictures along the plank road. The Pearl Bay has the biggest waterfall in Jiuzhaigou. But as the waterfall is rather close, a wide-angle lens is usually needed. Be careful not to let the mist wet your lens. Climb up the nearby mountain and you can take a panoramic picture of the magnificent waterfall.

Except for the Long Lake, Shuzheng Lake and the Five Flowers Lake where there are broader open areas and longer daylight hours, sunlight is available only between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. at the maximum in the valleys, so you don't need to get up too early and return too late.





The charming waters of Spark Lake (Flame Lake. 6x4.5 (cm), 120 camera, 45mm lens plus stereo-visor; aperture: 4; shutter: 1/16 second. (By Li Rong)



The reflections at the bottom of Mirror Lake, together with the plants on the surface and the colourful background, form a wonderful picture. 6x6 (cm), 120 camera, 80mm zoom plus stereo-visor. (By Chan Yat Nin)

Five Flowers Lake viewed from the highway at Lahukou (Tiger Mouth). 6x4.5 (cm), 120 camera, 250mm zoom plus stereo-visor. (By Chan Yat Nin)

# Songpan – City of Sunlight

**"Solitude comes all too often in life, because people are separated by chaotic war. The commissioner sent afar is not back yet to the snowy mountains; the royal army stations are still in Songzhou." This poem written by poet Li Shangyin of the Tang Dynasty tells of the topography and historic military importance of the old town of Songpan.**

Songpan is located at the area where the borders of Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai Provinces meet. So historically, it was strategically important in governing Sichuan, Shaanxi, Qinghai and Gansu Provinces economically and militarily. This 2,300-year-old town was also an important tea and horse trade centre for the ethnic groups from the northwestern areas.

## At Home with History

Relaxing in the oldest residential house in town, I thumbed over historical archives of Songpan. The host family are descendants of Ma Qianfu, a general of the Hui ethnic group who pacified the Greater and Lesser Jinchuan in 1772. The governor-general of Sichuan and Shaanxi Provinces mustered a large number of soldiers of the Hui ethnic group from Weinan in Shaanxi to station here. They cultivated the land in peace, but became servicemen during times of war. This was why so many Hui people settled here in Songpan.

A descendant of Ma Qianfu, Mai Tianyin is the eldest son in his family. He lives in the oldest wooden house in town, which has a history of 230 years. In the early 80s when Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong were just opening to tourists, there were no adequate facilities in Songpan. Since his house was the biggest residence in town, he was ordered to remodel it as a guesthouse. Only in the early 1990s was he able to make this house his home again. Mai Tianyin said many backpackers came from Hong Kong in the 80s, but fewer now than before. Instead, more foreign tourists came.

## Recapturing the Past

The city wall of Songpan was first built in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) when the Prefecture of Songzhou was established. In the early Ming

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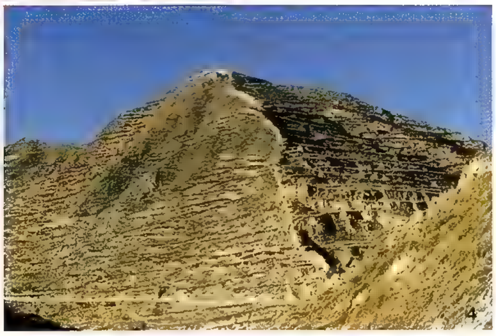

Dynasty (1368-1644), censor-in-chief and General Ding Yu of Ping Qiang began to expand the town on the basis of the original earthen walls to carry out Emperor's strategy of setting up Songpan as a garrison. During the 15th century, the western part of the city wall was extended to the top of the Western Mountain. In the 16th century, the outer walls were built up and the town of Songpan was first formed, with constant building for about 150 years. The city wall stretches majestically for 6.2 km up and down as the landform changes. The 30-m-wide and 12.5-m-high city wall used to have seven city gates; now only four are extant. The relief sculptures along the gateways and beside the city gates are still very clear. The city wall of Songpan is now under state protection.

Despite its eminent history, most tourists regard Songpan as a transfer station to Huanglong or Hongyuan. Although some sightseeing buses do stop here, they stay only long enough for tourists to take pictures in front of the city gates to the dismay of the people in Songpan. When I was there, I saw a lot of construction work going on. The local tourism bureau has planned to restore the Ming Dynasty architectural style of the town and regain its old historic charm. The construction work is expected to be finished in summer, when a different old-style Songpan will present itself to tourists, making it a must-see scenic spot.

Although the old town in construction was rather dusty, interest in its old charm was by no means abated. The town is very simple in layout. The bus terminal is outside the Northern City Gate, and from there it takes no more than half an hour to walk to the other end at the Southern City Gate. Along the way, there are scenic spots such as the Eastern City Gate, the Guangzhao Sepulture Pavilion, the Mosque, the Ancient-Pine Bridge, the Southern City Gate, the Moon-Lit Bridge, and the Pavilion of the Goddess of Mercy, and they can all be visited in only half a day.

## Take It Easy

I sipped tea in Mai Tianyin's large garden (also the biggest in town) while listening to the old town's anecdotes. He told me that this would be one of the most popular teahouses in town if it were not being remodelled. In spring, when the garden is full of blossom, it is the best place to chat with friends over a pot of tea.

I found that people in Songpan know how to lead a lifestyle that is simple and carefree. People in Songpan do not care much about details. If you ask a man the time, he might look up at the sun; if you ask him the temperature, he might ask you instead, "We can take off clothes if it's hot, and put on a jacket if it's cold. It doesn't matter what the temperature is."

Whenever the sun comes out, people in Songpan make for a teahouse, basking with a cup of tea, while chatting, reading, playing cards, or even sleeping. Influenced by their attitude, I spent a day in a teahouse too, doing nothing. I asked for a cup of Maofeng tea, and gnawed at a big plate of melon seeds and horsebeans free of charge while reading. What I enjoyed most was the warmth of the sun, which made up for the heat lost in the morning and at night.

I asked Mai Tianyin why life was so easy here. He said the local people all depended on farming and animal husbandry for a living, so winter was a time for rest without much work. What's more, as the government expropriated the land of many families to plant trees, they didn't have to farm anymore. Instead, the government gave them some grain every month. What an easy and carefree life!

1. **The Northern City Gate is a popular destination where visitors most often stop to take pictures. (By Dianna Lau)**
2. **The stone column bases of every city gate were carved in the shape of lotus flowers with exquisite workmanship. (By Dianna Lau)**
3. **Songpan is the source area of the Minjiang and Fujiang Rivers — both important branches of the upper Yangtze River. The Minjiang River runs through the Songpan Town. (By Liang Weiqiang)**
4. **The City Wall in western Songpan extends majestically to the top of the mountain. (By Dianna Lau)**
5. **The old house of Mai Tianyin. (By Dianna Lau)**

# **Horse Riding** in the Virgin Forest

**Horseback tours have become very popular in Songpan, attracting Chinese and foreign visitors all year round.**

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I had been longing to go horse riding in Songpan, but now I wasn't sure if I could make it in the dead of winter.

I asked my friend Mai Tianyin in Songpan to choose a route, contact the guide and find a good, obedient horse for me. He suggested that I try a two-day virgin forest trip, camp for a night, and return the next day. It sounded very attractive as the undeveloped forest area also has a green Jade Lake and a natural waterfall.

On Christmas Eve, I was alone in an Internet cafe, writing e-mails. Suddenly I heard cheering from the street. "It's snowing, heavy snow!" In an instant the ancient town turned white. A surprise white Christmas. I tightened my coat and ran back to the small hotel that had no heating. It was too cold to wash, as the towel and toothpaste had long been frozen. I huddled in the electric blanket and worried about the trip the next day.

At 9:30 a.m. I arrived at Mai Tianyin's home in heavy snow to meet the stableman. As I was trying to find an excuse to postpone the trip, Mai Tianyin said, "You're really lucky for the unexpected snow. The virgin forest will be very beautiful." Hearing this, I had to swallow my thoughts. The guide and stableman Ah Gui came with two horses. It was too late to change the plan, so I had to take whatever came. I mounted the horse with help, carrying only an automatic camera to take pictures along the trip. The horses carried the tent, sleeping bags, quilts, a camp stove and some grain.

## Learning to Relax

When we set off, the snow stopped. Ah Gui and I rode across the street. People looked out of their old houses here and there and waved to us. Suddenly I didn't feel cold anymore.

Leaving the old town, we set out into the mountains. I was too tense, and my movements were very stiff. Ah Gui had to turn back to watch and remind me from time to time, "Keep your body relaxed and always upright." I soon came to realise this was really the one and only way to master horsemanship.

Whether climbing up a slope (when the body should lean forward softly), or descending (when the body should lean backward or I had to get off the horse to walk), or entering woods (when I had to lower my head), or riding cross a frozen gully (when I had to walk), we had to keep our bodies and minds relaxed. This depended first of all on our confidence in the horses. The more we

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trusted our horses, the more confident we would be. Although I didn't know much about horsemanship, when I got on the horse, I chose to trust the horse completely. This way, I was free from any unnecessary worries. After all, the horse was an expert traveller, and what I needed to do was to enjoy all it could give me. When the body and mind became relaxed completely, a miracle happened. I had returned to the naturally balanced state, without making much effort. Ah Gui seemed a little surprised, saying that he would never believe it was my first long horseback journey.

## My Own Amusement Park

We crossed two mountains rather easily, passing through snow-covered villages and saw the face of the magnificent Xuebaoding (Treasured Snow Summit) Mountain. I would never forget going through a pine forest on a snowy mountain when the horse suddenly startled after slipping on the icy ground. I lost my balance too. If Ah Gui didn't grab me, I would had been rolling on the ground.

At about 2 p.m. we arrived at the virgin forest though much startled. As an experienced guide, Ah Gui skillfully set up the tent. Then he began to make a fire to cook and boil "horse tea" (since the Tang and Song Dynasties, the tea traders of Songpan have transported tea leaves to Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Tibet to trade for horses, thus the name "horse tea"). After lunch, I hurried to walk to the Green Jade Lake before it was dark and took some great pictures of the snow-frosted lake. Then I went further into the forest to the lower reaches of the waterfall. This was even more wonderful. Seeing stalactites of snow, I was amazed and as happy as a child in an amusement park. Yet this was totally free, enabling me to enjoy it the whole afternoon until sunset. The virgin forest after snow was dazzlingly and breathtaking.

## Back to Basics

I returned to the camping ground before sunset. Ah Gui was cooking supper — a pot of noodles with shredded potato and Chinese cabbage. The meal was simple, but especially delicious eaten in the embrace of nature. We ate by the fire chatting until the sky was full of stars. As I was a woman, Ah Gui insisted on sleeping outside the four-person tent, saying that it was easier to get up at midnight to feed the horses.

Cold air got into the tent from all directions at night, but I just put on more clothes when I felt cold. I slipped into the quilt Ah Gui had carefully prepared and found that it had as many as seven layers. It's strange that normally I must check the quilt in a hotel before I go to bed, but in the tent that night, everything had become unimportant except keeping warm. I was too tired to bother with all but the most basic concerns. I began to like this lifestyle. Although it was not as cold as I imagined when actually lying in the thick quilt, my body felt stiff all over and my head was almost numb even in a thick cap. I felt as if I had passed the whole night half-conscious. When the sun appeared, I was in a hurried to get up. As I was about to drink from a mineral water bottle nearby, but I found that the water had long been frozen...

This is a true winter vacation indeed!

**1. The newly fallen snow reveals the shape of the land. (By Dianna Lau)**
**2. The backdrop in the far distance is the Xuebaoding Mountain.**
**3. The Feicui (Green Jade) Lake in green and white. (By Dianna Lau)**
**4. My guide Ah Gui skillfully prepared everything needed for the trip. (By Dianna Lau)**

## Horse Riding:

**Contact:** Mai Tianyin **Tel:** (837) 7231216

**Charge:** Around 110 yuan a day/person (including tour guide, horse, food and tent; excluding entry ticket and forest protection fee).

**Route:** In addition to the two or three-day standard tours to Munigou, Erdaohai and Kuangquan (horses are not allowed to enter the Zhaga Waterfalls site), there are also programs such as the forest tour (two days), Xuebaoding (Snow-Capped Summit) (four days), Songpan grassland tour and the new routes of Kuoshiyan and Hongxinyan.

**The Shunjiang Horse Tour Co.** has merged with the Happy Trail Horse Tour.

**Location:** About five minutes walk southwards from the Passenger Bus Station. Tel: (837) 72310641

**Charge:** 80 yuan a day/person (including tour guide, horse, food, and tent; excluding entry tickets or forest protection fee).

**Programs:** Munigou two-day tour, Zhaga Waterfalls two-day tour (it can be extended to three days to take in Kuangquanshui), Snow-Capped Summit four-day tour and grassland tour.

# Solo in Huanglong

**I had been to Huanglong three years before and fell in love with it even more deeply than with Jiuzhaigou at first sight. I had promised myself that I would visit again.**

Before I set off, everyone I met told me that I couldn't visit Huanglong because the heavy snow would have sealed the mountain pass. But in Songpan, my friend Mai Tianyin told me that December is the dry month in winter, with little snow and a lot of sunshine. Hearing this, I was again burning with the desire to see Huanglong. I asked him if it was too wild an idea to visit Huanglong in winter. He was surprised and asked me, "Why not?"

## On the Road Again

If I had not asked the question, I would have missed a wonderful winter tour to Huanglong. Mai Tianyin found a reliable driver for me at the friendly price of 100 yuan a day.

I met the driver at 9 a.m. sharp and we set off on a cloudless sunny morning. A good wide blacktop road ascended continuously from 2,000 to 4,000 m above sea level up the mountain. The mountains by the road were all bald, but appeared not too desolate thanks to the sprinkling of snow.

After a few wide turns, the familiar sight of Xuebaoding Mountain appeared again before us. The white triangle emerged from the mist and presented itself completely under the blue sky with all its grandeur. A few Tibetans were standing in the biting wind at a viewing spot over 4,000 m above sea level, paying homage to the holy mountain.

The road condition along the way was surprisingly good with few other vehicles.

I asked the driver when the mountain might be closed. Pointing at the hill to the left, he said, "See these gentle slopes? When there is a heavy snow, it gathers at the top and then slides downwards, pushing the cars down the mountain along the slopes. Because of a heavy snow a few days ago, there are fewer cars on the road."

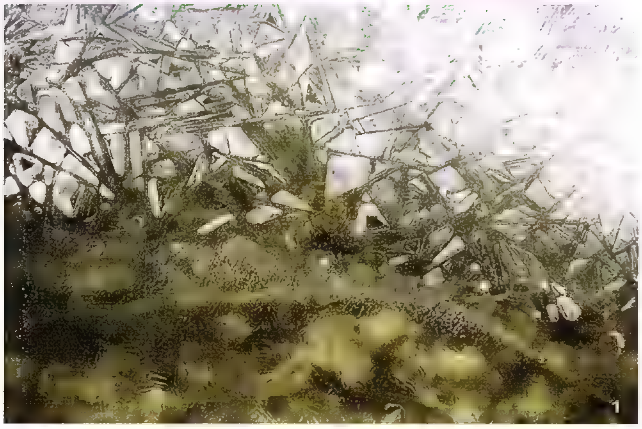
## A Rare Winter Visitor

We reached the entrance to Huanglong at 10:30 a.m. after travelling for just an hour and a half. There were many changes outside the entrance: all the clutter and disorder of the high season were gone, replaced by a rare serenity and cleanness, with no visitors but a few bright-coloured hotels, restaurants, shops and an administrative building on the street.

I couldn't hold back my excitement and entered the park

1. **The Multicolour Pond under the hoar-frosted trees. (By Wang Jianjun)**
2. **Behind the ancient Huanglong Temple are the Multicolour Pond that covers an area of about one kilometre square. (By Dianna Lau)**

# Solo in Huanglong



immediately. The person in the ticket office looked at me in surprise, saying I was the only visitor to Huanglong that day. I was surprised that the scenic region was still opened in such a season. It turned out that the park was guarded all year round for forest protection. It is opened to visitors all year round, but as there is always a risk visiting Huanglong in winter, and the park wasn't promoted for this season.

Before I went up the mountains, the office staff told me time and again to keep safe and take enough food, because all the facilities, except the toilet, were closed, and all the hiking paths were 3,000 m above sea level, with the highest at 3,570 m. I patted my camera kit and food supply in the 12-kg backpack, and bid goodbye to the office worker.

## A World of White

Getting into the scenic region, I could see that it had been snowing heavily. Huanglong's scenic spots are closely located, so tourists only have to follow the plank road and walk slowly to enjoy all the beautiful sights in a day without the trouble of waiting for buses.

Although it was my second trip there, Huanglong in winter was still strange to me.

A tourist map with pictures is very important, for it helped me to locate the sights by following the clues.

Maybe because I'm a southerner, I was very excited at the sight of sparkling white snow. Seeing the fantastic sight of running water being frozen in movement, I seemed to have peered into the secret of time.

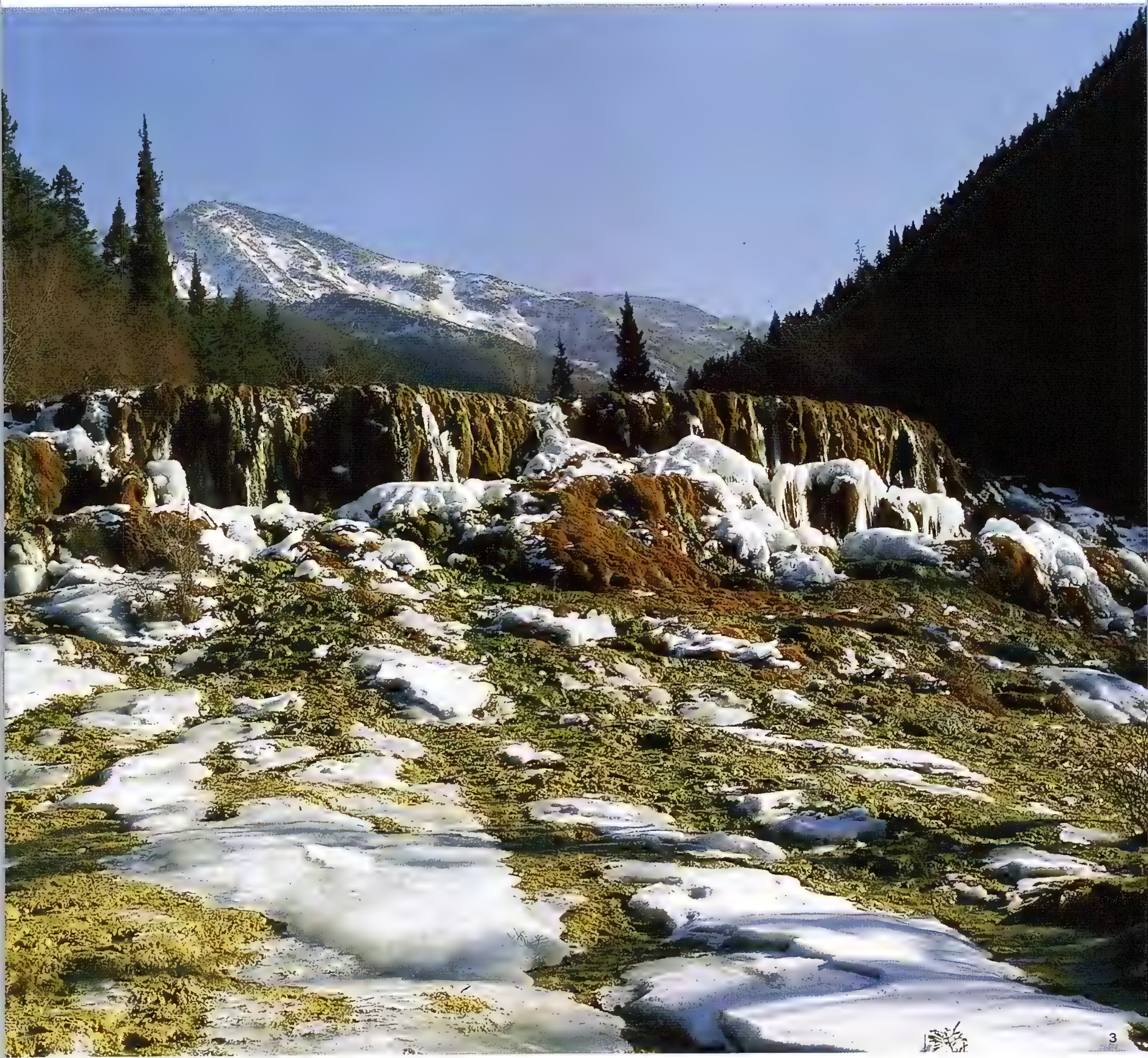
## Speaking Out for Huanglong

Before long I came to the two well-known spots: Swift and Resplendent Waterfall and Bathing Cave. These strips of icicles looked strange. The crystal clear and silky water curtain had become a hard, icy curtain.

Passing the Bathing Cave, I was surprised at the sound of talking behind me. It turned out to be three more visitors. They came from the north and were nowhere near as excited as I was at the sight of the white world. In fact, they were greatly disappointed at not being able to see the green ponds they had anticipated. I couldn't help speaking out on behalf of Huanglong, telling them firmly that there must be some more unfrozen ponds formed of calcium carbonate sediment, and what's more, the Multicolour Pond is the best in the whole region. They were persuaded by my words and hiked upwards confidently.

## Seasonal Changes

I continued to slowly look around, taking quite a few good close-ups of ice and snow. All of a sudden, my view broadened as the distant snowy mountains stood beyond a vast stretch of area which was white as milk. I recognized it as the Golden Sand Beach. This 1,500-m-long and up to 120-m-wide calcareous tufa



waterfall is the most imposing of its kind in the world. In summer, the shallow water flows along the golden sloping edges of the pond. The gurgling water sounds like pearls scattering on the ground. Now the ripples were unbroken waves of snow.

## Back to the Ponds

I would never forget how I enjoyed the sight of these beautiful ponds three years ago. Now the biggest group of colourful ponds in Huanglong was just as intoxicating. Each pond had some charm of its own with their different shapes and depths: some still rippling and sparkling in the sun; some half frozen in green and white; some already firmly frozen, looking like cream on a cake. There were simply too many beautiful sights to see and photograph, if only I had enough film....

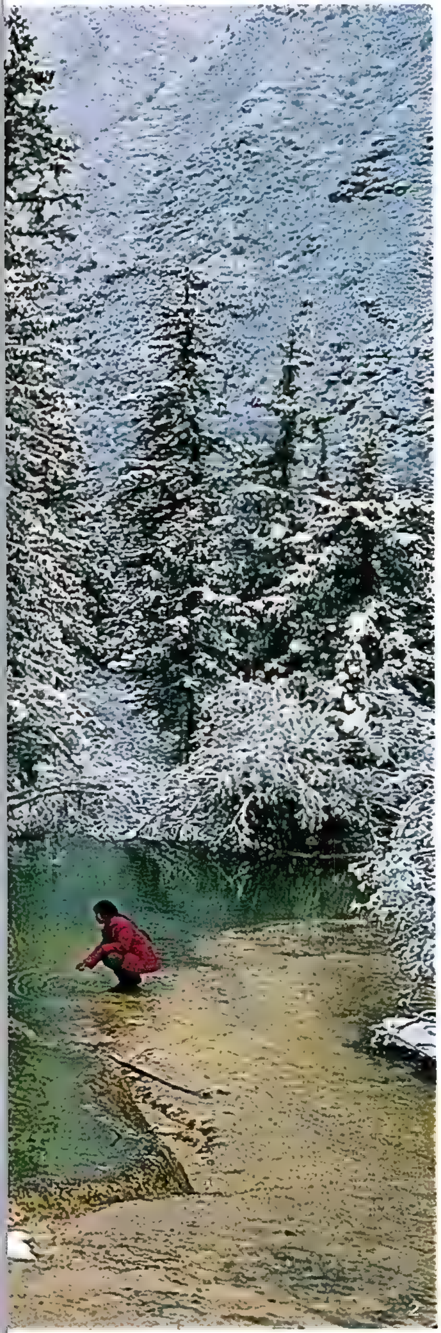
After visiting the Zhengyan (Contending-for-Beauty) Pond, I went for a long, hard walk to the last scenic spot — the Multicolour Pond, but

**1. A masterpiece of Nature. (By Dianna Lau)**
**2. The Bathing Cave covered by an ice curtain. (By Dianna Lau)**
**3. The Swift and Resplendent Waterfall in winter. (By Dianna Lau)**

it was very rewarding. Many visitors never make it because of lack of time or energy.

As I made an appointment with the driver to return to the entrance at 4 p.m., I was pressed by time and the fear that he might be worried about me. But I would not give up this highest (3,750 m) spot in the region. Carrying a bag of over 12 kg, I was dismayed at my physical limits. After an hour of hiking I was sweating all over. So I took off my overcoat, then the padded anorak, but still, my back was covered with sweat. I was suffering a little from the lack of oxygen, food and water. If I hadn't known the exquisite beauty of the Multicolour Pond beforehand, I might have given up halfway.

Passing the Huanglong Central Temple and the closed restaurant, I



## Tips for Huanglong

### Winter activities:

**Admission:** 110 yuan; but 70 yuan in the low season (Nov.-April)

**Transport:** There is no bus between Songpan and Huanglong in winter, so you have to hire a taxi, which costs around 150 yuan for a round trip.

**Accommodation:** Hotels outside Huanglong Scenic Area are closed in winter. It is advisable to find a place for the night either in Songpan or Chuanzhusi.

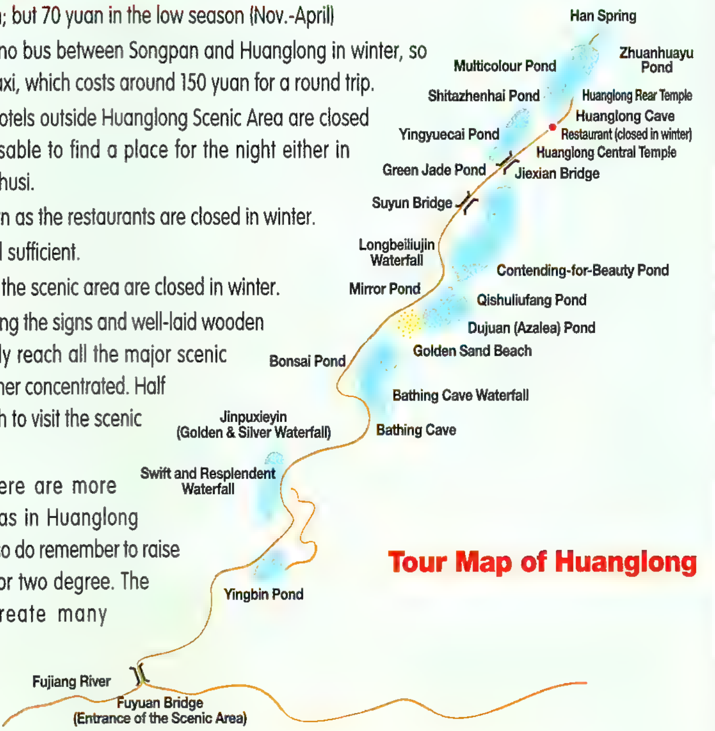
**Food:** Bring your own as the restaurants are closed in winter.

**Lavatory:** Clean and sufficient.

**Shopping:** Shops in the scenic area are closed in winter.

**Sightseeing:** Following the signs and well-laid wooden trails, you can easily reach all the major scenic spots, which are rather concentrated. Half a day will be enough to visit the scenic area.

**Photography:** There are more snow-covered areas in Huanglong than in Jiuzhaigou, so do remember to raise your aperture one or two degree. The ice and snow create many fantastic shapes while the colourful ponds remain semi-frozen.


Han Spring
Zhuanhuayu Pond
Multicolour Pond
Shitazhenhai Pond
Huanglong Rear Temple
Huanglong Cave
Restaurant (closed in winter)
Yingyuecai Pond
Huanglong Central Temple
Green Jade Pond
Jiexian Bridge
Suyun Bridge
Longbeiliujin Waterfall
Contending-for-Beauty Pond
Mirror Pond
Qishuliufang Pond
Dujuan (Azalea) Pond
Bonsai Pond
Golden Sand Beach
Bathing Cave Waterfall
Jinpuxieyin (Golden & Silver Waterfall)
Bathing Cave
Swift and Resplendent Waterfall
Yingbin Pond
Fujiang River
Fuyuan Bridge (Entrance of the Scenic Area)

Tour Map of Huanglong

Note: Some trails on the hills may be closed in winter. Remember to descend the same way you went up.

knew I was close. Finally I reached the Huanglong Temple and saw the tourists I had recently met taking a rest. They seemed to see me as a saviour and asked, "Have we reached the Multicolour Pond?" "They're right behind the temple." While they went to visit the ponds, I went to the viewing platform halfway up the mountain to take pictures alone. Looking down at the ponds under the hoar-frosted trees in a world of ice and snow, I could no longer hold back my excitement. I remembered what I said to my colleagues, "If I don't come back from this trip, I will be staying for good in beautiful Huanglong."

**1. Savouring the tranquility in Huanglong Scenic Region. (By Lin Yiping)**
**2. A half-frozen pond (By Dianna Lau)**

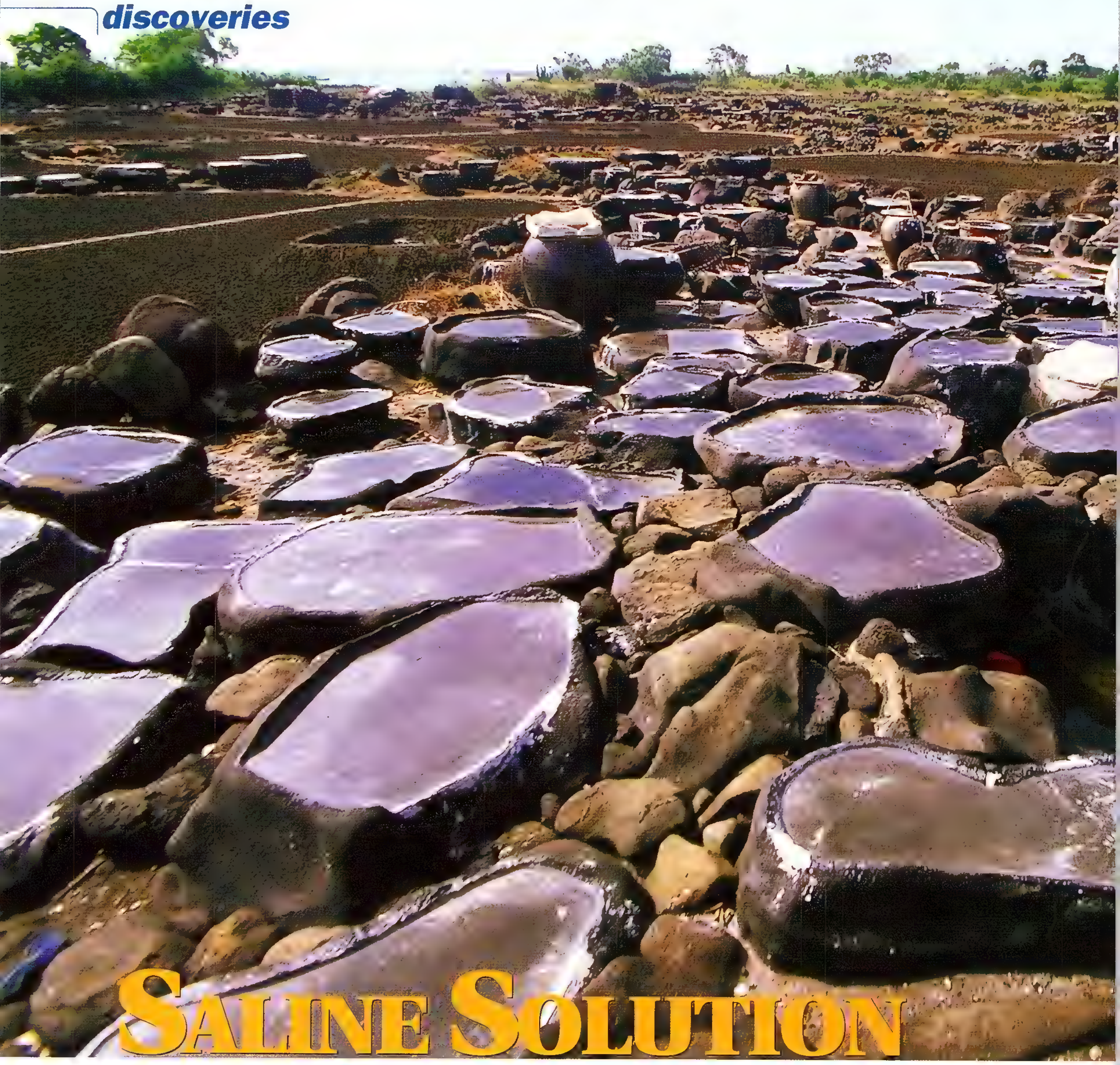
Taking a rest in the virgin forest.

## Postscript

### Alone on the Way

In order to provide the latest travel information to readers before the end of the winter, the trip was taken in haste. I dared not leave too early because I was told that winter wouldn't start until later December. But I had to meet the deadline for the article. With no choice, I had to travel through the winter solstice, and the festivals of Christmas and New Year.

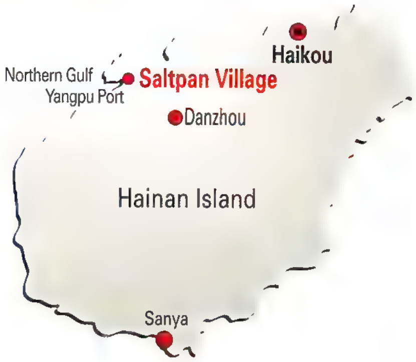
I have long been used to travelling alone, but on every festive day one will miss one's family. I want to thank my friends, including the sponsors of my travel kit and flights, workers at the scenic regions, guesthouse hosts, ticket salespersons in train stations, and all the friends I came to know during the trip, who gave me care and help. Without them, it would have been a cold and lonely journey.



# SALINE SOLUTION

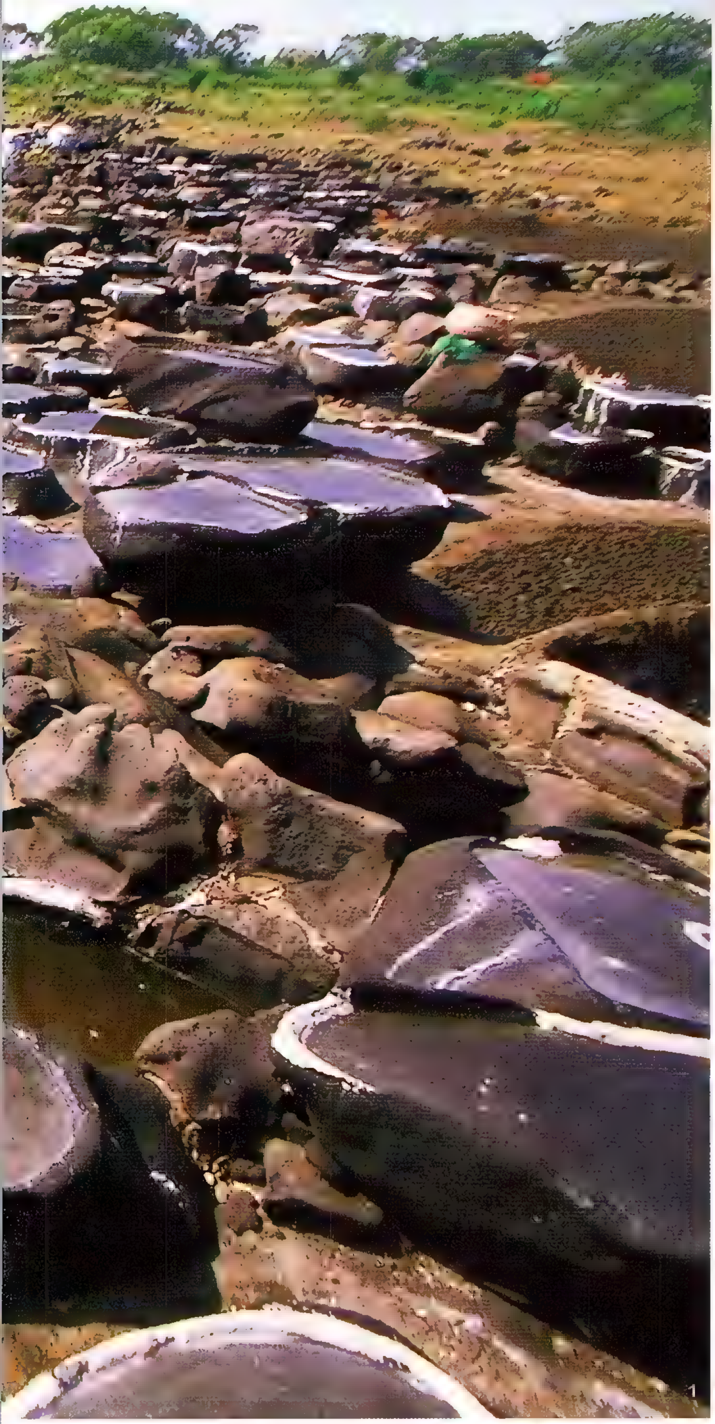
## The Saltpan Village of Hainan

*Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong*


Haikou
Northern Gulf
Saltpan Village
Yangpu Port
Danzhou
Hainan Island
Sanya

In a remote corner of northwestern Hainan island, Danzhou was a renowned place of exile in history. Offenders in officialdom would be sent here.

Near the seashore of Danzhou is a small village seldom visited by outsiders. About 1,200 years ago, a group of migrants from Putian, Fujian Province, came and settled here. Making use of the lava rock, they discovered a unique way to produce salt. Hence the name of the village — Yantian (Saltpan). To this day, over 40 households still make a living from the traditional salt-making methods.



Their intelligent ancestors knew long ago how to make full use of marine resources. The method of boiling seawater to make salt dates back to Yangshao Culture in 3000 BC.

### Sunshine and Seawater

I arrived at the Saltpan Village at daybreak. All was quiet in the houses built of the volcanic rock.

To the east of the village, terraces of salt troughs and saltpans lie scattered on the sloping shore of Xinying Bay. Tidewater ebbs and flows repeatedly for five to six days at each rising tide. Several salt workers came along a country path. Uncle Tan was the first at work. He raked his wet saltpan roughly with a wooden rake. Usually he does it several times.

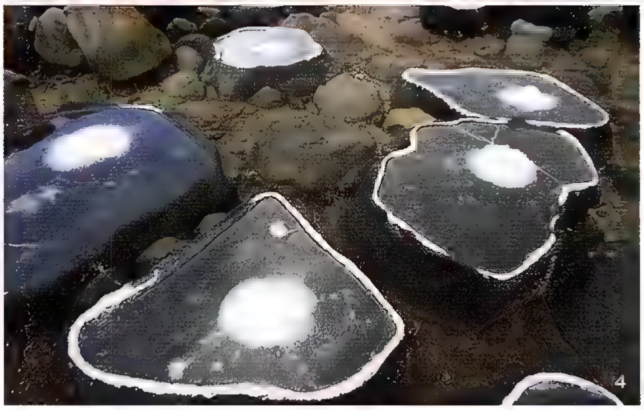
"Will there be a high tide again this afternoon?" I asked the old worker.

He nodded. "This saltpan is probably too high for the tide to reach it."

If the tide could not reach the saltpan that afternoon, Uncle Tan's labour would be for nothing.

Raking and sunning the briny sand is the first step in salt making. Over the following three days, the saltpans need continuous raking and

1. A stretch of ancient saltpans comprising 7,000 salt troughs made of lava rock.
2. The used sand is raked over in the saltpan for use again.
3. Salt workers collect their yield every afternoon.
4. Crystal clear: salt forms as the water evaporates.



sunning until the briny sand is completely dry. The second step is to take the dried sand to a so-called filter-pond five to six square metres in the area. The pond is built in the saltpan with rice straw and bamboo mats as the filter. It is a unique filter system. Workers sprinkle seawater on the sand before they jump into the pond and tread steadily on the soil. The brine with its high salt content slowly seeps from the bottom of the salt pond into the brine pond below the salt pond.

Evaporating the brine in the sun is the last step. At dawn, salt workers carry brine with buckets and pour it into salt troughs. Around four o'clock in the afternoon, the brine becomes white granulated salt after evaporating in the sun for a whole day.

Generally, on the fourth day after the ebb, they can get the first yield. After that, they can collect salt every day from the stored seawater and brine. In strong sunshine, they will add more brine after midday to raise the yield.

## Floating a Theory

Uncle Tan is a lean 75-year-old. As an experienced salt worker, he can tell the salt content in the brine merely by a look of it. He told me that there was a simple way to test the concentration of the brine. Breaking a two-inch twig off a bush near the salt pond, he peeled off the bark and threw it in the brine. The twig floated. He said if the salt content was insufficient, the twig would sink into the brine and stop at the depth where the salt content was up to the standard.

The bush is known locally as huangyuci and can be found where there are saltpans.

## Harvesting the Sea

The saltpans are built at the bay near the sea. That saves the salt workers from carrying seawater to the saltpans. They must dig ponds in the saltpans. When seawater surges at rising tide, it floods the saltpans and remains in the ponds at ebb tide. The sand soaked in seawater absorbs salt.

Most of the salt workers in the village have an intimate knowledge of celestial phenomena. They can calculate tides. The arrangement and the process of salt making are designed scientifically. The process of sunning sand, digging ponds near the sea, filtering seawater, evaporating brine and crystallizing salt has evolved over many generations.

The salt trough is the crystallisation of the salt workers' collective wisdom. The location of the village has a history of frequent and violent volcanic eruptions. The local people use the solidified lava to make salt

troughs and have brought to an end the ancient method of boiling brine to make salt. Their methods are also pollution-free.

Salt troughs are chiseled out of lava rock with several millimetres left as the brim. Those made from individual pieces of rock must be laid firmly and horizontally. The large troughs are about one square metre in size while the smaller ones are as big as a washbasin. The natural rocks are unique in shape. Some look like monstrous animals, some like flowerpots. Most resemble ink stones. Polished by time, they have broken edges or cracks at the bottom.

The descendants of the village have ceased to make new salt troughs, probably because it is too difficult or because sites available for salt troughs are limited. The 7,300 salt troughs still in use are part of the precious heritage of their ancestors.

## The Salt Pioneers

People from Fujian began to migrate to Danzhou 1,200 years ago. A man named Tan Zhengde came to Yangpu Bay in Hainan with his brothers. In the new environment, the former salt workers hoped to find another way to make a living. Tan found salt crystals on the rocks. It dawned on him that they could obtain salt by evaporation and give up the traditional method of boiling brine.

He led a group of salt workers to Xinying Bay where lava rocks were in great quantity. They began to try an unprecedented way of making salt, doing away with the ancient method that had existed for thousands of years.

They kept the new method secret over the years, but the story spread.

## Salt-Baked Chicken

At the home of village head Chen Erjie, I saw the chicken wrapped in oiled paper was ready to bake. The host put about three kilograms of salt in an iron pot and quick fried it for quite a while before putting it into an earthen pot. Then he buried the wrapped chicken in the heated salt. Thirty minutes later, he withdrew the pot from fire and put it aside for a few moments. When the dish was served on the table, I found the chicken skin slightly brown, the meat tender and very tasty. Seasoned with salt, we quickly finished the dish.

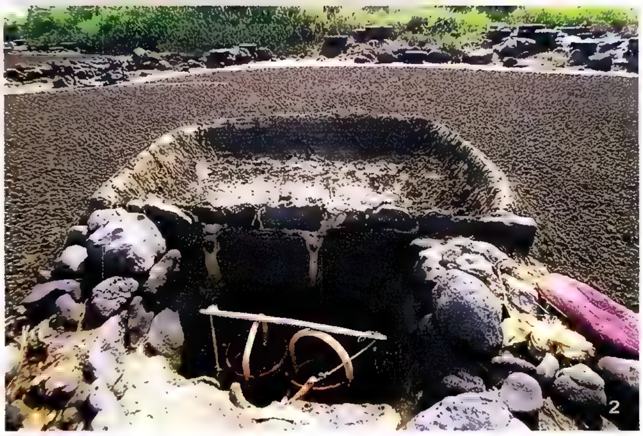
In fact, as a common dish of every local family, salt-baked chicken has become a staple food for the villagers. It is best accompanied by wine made of glutinous rice. It is especially good for women lying in or weak and aged people.

There are also salt-baked fish, salt-baked prawns and others. The villagers intend to develop a new series of salt-baked foods.

## The Sweet Taste of Salt

When eating fruit such as apples, carambolas, pineapples, of pears, the locals like to sprinkle salt on them. Fruit stands usually give customers a small pack of salt. When they eat watermelon, they habitually put some salt on a knife or brush salt on the melons. In this way, they say, the fruit tastes sweeter and more succulent. The old saying, "If anything does not taste sweet enough, add some salt", abruptly came to mind. It probably originated in this village.

Xiaoshigua, in the shape of watermelon, is very popular in the village. They cut its top and stir salt into its flesh with chopsticks. It is the most popular fruit in summer. Fresh and cool, it can quench thirst and relieve a heated body. The melon can also be pickled. The process is to bore a hole in it, dip it in boiling water and pickle it with salt. It is ready in a few days. Other pickles include leaf mustard, garlic leaf, rutabaga and radish.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1. **Before sunrise, Uncle Tan begins to pour brine into the salt troughs.**
2. **The arrangement of the saltpans, filter-ponds and brine ponds is the crystallisation of their ancestors' wisdom.**
3. **A good harvest — packing the salt.**

The salt made in lava troughs is not only tasty, but also has some therapeutic effects. If an older villager has toothache caused by inflammation, the simplest way to cure it is to apply a few grains of salt on the gum of the suffering tooth. Before long, the ache will naturally vanish. From time immemorial, they have formed a habit of feeding babies with brown rice and a bit salt. Babies in the village can generally walk as early as they are nine months old.

1

## The Rise and Fall of a Salt Family

In the past, salt was one of the commodities strictly controlled and monopolized by the authorities. There was no exception for the Saltpan Village. It was illegal to export salt without the stamp of the Salt Administration Office distinctly on the tops of the baskets of compacted salt. The Saltpan Village was once very well known. Merchants of the trade showed great interest in the uniquely made salt. As a result, salt stores emerged, up to 12 at their peak. They sold salt in baskets. One basket of salt cost two silver dollars. Their produce was bartered, saving the villagers from getting their daily necessities far from their village. Fishermen from other coastal regions came to buy salt as well. They pickled snapper when they were still at sea. It was generally acknowledged that they could make the best pickled snapper with the salt from the Saltpan Village.

2

Accompanied by the village head, I visited Tan Decai and his brother's homes. Their grandfather was the salt monger of one of the main salt stores.

Like other villagers, 65-year-old Tan lives in a house built of lava rock. The only difference is the large pieces of rock used as building materials are evenly polished both inside and out. Other houses have the walls polished only on the outside.

For several generations, the Tan family has been engaged in salt farming and once was the wealthiest in the village. They occupied a great number of saltpans and ran several salt stores. They had a secret cabin for keeping their money.

"They have so much money that they had to carry it to the cabin by ox cart." Tan Decai told me the glorious story of his ancestors with pride.

Later the family's fortunes declined. His generation once again became ordinary salt workers. On the altar of his family are memorial tablets to his ancestors and a wooden sculpture.

I saw in his courtyard a large stone used as the sliding weight of a steelyard, troughs for feeding pigs and a millstone, all made of lava. Tan's brother, living next door, heard that I was interested in their ancient utensils and came over to show me some of his treasures. Among them, there were tools for making salt and a peacock tail feather formerly worn at the back of the mandarin hat of one of his ancestors.

## Rising from the Salt Trade

Walking in the brine evaporation area, I saw here and there gravestones on a hillside. I found something like diplomas inscribed on a few of them. For example, one has: Tomb of (the deceased), my venerated father, graduate of Baima High School.

Later the village head told me it was a local custom that when a villager died, the family inscribes the record of the deceased's schooling or the name of the most outstanding family member on the gravestone. I scanned several of them. One of the occupants of the graves was endowed with the title of gongsheng, candidate recommended by local authorities to study at the Imperial College of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Others include a graduate from a teachers college during the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), a high school graduate and one who engaged in advanced studies at the Central Party School. All these are inscribed on a conspicuous place. They testify to the villagers' respect for culture and education.

When I inquired about the number of college students in the village, the head said they had several students admitted to college every year. In recent years, the Chen clan alone had a dozen children who had passed the college entrance examination. The Tan households had the most children studying in college or university.

"Next year and the year after," said the village head confidently, "there will be two more, from my family. My son and my daughter are now at high school. Both of them do exceedingly well in the classes of top students. They will have no problem getting into university." I noticed many certificates of merit for his children pasted with pride on a wall, but those of the parents in a corner. The arrangement of certificates is mostly the same in other families.

I was surprised at their stress on education, qualifications and certificates in such a small seaside village.

## Putting a Damper on the Day

It was the afternoon tide when I left the Saltpan Village. The tide was obviously lower than the previous day. Uncle Tan's saltpan was not inundated as expected. The brine in several dozen troughs he prepared early in the morning had dried out. A coat of white salt crystals started to appear.

Suddenly thunder rumbled and dark clouds gathered. The salt workers rushed to their own saltpans to collect the salt. They heaped up the salt with a scraping board, shovelled it into bamboo baskets and sealed them with plastic sheets. Then they put the baskets in large earthen jars for the water to drain thoroughly before shipment.

Uncle Tan had finished his work. Raindrops fell and other salt workers had to give up their yield in a dozen salt troughs. Rain is their principal enemy. An unexpected rain will spoil a day's labour. Not only will it ruin the salt in the troughs, but also the sand in the storage ponds, the brine ponds and the saltpans will be affected. Washed by rainwater, the salt content drops, lowering the yield in following days.

It is fortunate that Saltpan Village has less rainfall than other places, and therefore, they have been enjoyed such solicitude for a thousand years.

*Translated by Anju K.*

1. **The walls and the enclosures of the houses are made from lava rock.**
2. **The next generation: salt farmers or college graduates?**
3. **A gathering of the Tan clan at their family memorial temple.**
4. **Children play at the Chen family memorial temple.**

# PUTTING MY FEET UP AT SHAOLIN

Photos by He laigui   Article by Kit

**Notwithstanding that I am a woman, I have always been fascinated by Chinese kung fu.**

**As I grew up, I thought of enrolling in a martial arts class, but the pressures of life made me give up. Unexpectedly this autumn I toured Henan Province, where I picked up martial arts again as if by a predestined act. What I learned is famously known as Shaolin kung fu.**

As we drove by car to Dengfeng City, where Mount Songshan is located, I noticed many martial arts schools: Shi Xiaolong Martial Arts College, Shaolin E Po Martial Arts Institute, Shaolin Martial Arts Athletic School.... They present a busy scene. Within a few minutes we had arrived at the Shaolin Temple at the foot of the mountain. We arrived to see hundreds of students in neat athletic clothing in the big field moving in unison with bent legs and practising Chinese boxing.

The Shaolin Martial Arts College has a rich tradition and heritage. When I was there, the students with shaved heads were striving to squat to warm up their legs. This aroused my impulse to learn martial arts, which had been almost forgotten. On learning that different

1. **On the defence: the famous Shaolin monks in action.**
2. **Shaolin martial arts originated at the Shaolin Temple**
3. **Shaolin Martial Arts Training Centre is located near the millennium-old Shaolin Temple**

courses are offered with different schedules, I decided to stay a few days to satisfy my long held yearning to learn martial arts.

Since the movie Shaolin Temple was shown in the 1980s, Shaolin has become a top martial arts school. Martial arts schools have sprung up all around the Shaolin Temple, Dengfeng City and the surrounding area. Students flock there from all over the country. Shaolin Martial Arts Training Centre came into being in 1988, just 700 m from the temple. There is a college for Chinese students and an international department to teach foreign students. They have their own Martial Arts Hall, gymnasium, sword factory, hotel, dining hall and tourism agency. It constitutes a small town. Apart from the school, it boasts a renowned martial arts performances for tourists.

There are eight coaches in the international department, who are mainly responsible for teaching foreign nationals and compatriots from Hong Kong and Macao. Prior to my arrival, a group of Australian students had just completed their training and departed.

Since I only had three days, and a short course would take at least seven days, I became afraid. But a coach told me that three days were enough to learn a series of simple Xiao Hong boxing techniques. I asked him to take me as his student and he agreed.

## Meeting My Big Brothers

Courses offer two hours of training in the morning and afternoon every day. Morning classes begin at 9 a.m. I got up, washed and had breakfast. I arrived on time. I learned that I had two senior students, Gregory, from Russia, and Shenxian, from Chaozhou, as classmates. Gregory spoke simple and broken English. I learned that he was a student, 19 years old, from Irkutsk. He was learning Luohan boxing. Gregory did not hire an interpreter, but through signs and watching the teacher, he learned rather well. Shenxian, 7 or 8 years old, looked rather strange. He suffered from epilepsy and convulsions. It was said that his mother asked many famous doctors to cure her son, but to no avail. She sent him to Shaolin to learn martial arts. He was nicknamed Shenxian or the Celestial One because he was not devoted to learning and was not diligent. However, if people were not paying attention to him he would suddenly start practising boxing, as if possessed by a celestial being. People expressed surprise at this strange behaviour. The two students had been learning under Coach Yu for more than a week. I was their younger sister. I put my palms together before them and said "teacher" to Yu and "elder brothers" to the other two. Thus I began my lessons.

## Limbering Up

At first I was asked to warm up and run. I was out of breath, expecting to begin learning orthodox Shaolin boxing. I was ordered to squat to warm up the legs. Before training, I had to perform basic skills. A stone was placed before me just above the level of my waist. I had to put my leg on top of it. What's more, I had to stretch my arms out straight. The lower part of my body felt like a tightly stretched bow. Knowing my limits, the teacher stopped me. Slowly I adapted. I was asked to stretch my other leg. Having done this several times with both legs, my muscles relaxed.

So I had a taste of stretching my legs. Yet there was another basic skill to be mastered: kicking. It looked easy when the teacher showed us: he put his two hands straight on two sides; putting one leg forward, he kicked forward with the other leg. The movements became more and more complex. One has to kick forward, back, higher, and jump up with a "flying leg". The legs must be straight all the time, head erect, the body never bent. As I watched, Gregory, the foreign elder brother, began his turn in a very skillful manner. I followed suit. My legs seemed more flexible than before, thanks to the stretching. I was able to kick higher than I expected. In the final "jump up with flying legs" I felt like a frog with a lame leg. I remember the words of my teacher, "Only when you have mastered basic skills, will you will have everything under perfect control."

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## A Code of Honour

Following two hours of basic skill exercises we began learning Shaolin boxing. Since my time was limited, I was to be given a primer lesson in Xiao Hong boxing. The original 55 movements were simplified to 24, by omitting repetitious movements. The moves were easy to learn and easy to remember. They also made me stronger. Learning eight moves a day, I could master boxing in three days. The teacher demonstrated each move.

I knew, however, that power was not the only aim of Shaolin boxers. The ultimate aim is attaining the highest level in Buddhist meditation and boxing in one discipline. The incumbent chief monk Shi Yong Xin said, "The first movement in Xiao Hong Quan is 'Holding the Moon by the Breast'. This is a preparatory move to show that boxers honour other people. It means we will not be the first to attack. Top boxers should not rely on superior kung fu to dominate others. On the contrary they give others due respect." The next movement was described as "White Cloud over the Peak", a move to disarm an attacker with the left hand, while holding the right hand atop one's own head for protection. This shows the opposite number that the Shaolin boxer was still on the defensive, not the offensive. He hopes the other side will stop the attack. If the other party persists in the aggression, the Shaolin boxer steps forward and stretches out his palm, in a genuine competitive mood. With such a philosophy, Shaolin martial arts gained an international reputation as the representative of Chinese martial arts.

The teacher pointed out several factors to be taken into consideration. First: the eyes should be focused on the specific

**1. Light as a swallow**
**2. More foreigners are attracted to Shaolin kung fu.**
**3. Shaolin Martial Arts Training Centre**
**4. The beautiful Songshan mountains are an ideal place to practise.**

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subject. Two: the breast must be broadly held. The hips must be straight, and never bent. Three: when arms strike, they can be easy for one to attack during offensive and defend oneself when in retreat. Four: in pursuit, the movements should be low key. During retreat make the movements high. In lifting the leg the movement should be as light as a feather. In stepping on ground the movement should be as firm as a mountain.

It is easy to listen to instructions but difficult to comprehend the real message. My hands and feet did not obey my orders. The hips were not straight. I turned my body in the wrong direction and forgot my next move. My leg remained in the air after kicking. I sweated. My teacher did not reprimand me. He smiled and demonstrated again. He explained to me the tactics of each move.

Compared with other students, my hard work was really nothing. I met 21-year-old Pan Anyang, a student of long standing. He came here at age six on the bidding of his parents from the province of Anhui. He spent more than a decade in the institute. With head shaved, he went under a Buddhist name at the Shaolin Temple and is a lay Buddhist. He gets up at 5:30 a.m. and trains the whole day. He only attends classes on Chinese language and culture. He practices hand movements, kicking, stretching and other movements. He handles all sorts of weapons day in, day out. He does this regardless of wintry cold or summer heat. He recalled his early days. "I was young," he said. "I felt it was too much hard work and tiresome. I thought of going home. I cried for three months. Gradually I adapted." He has mastered kung fu and the three-section club. He is a member of the exhibition team of 80 top students, and is an assistant coach. He has toured many countries. I saw pictures of him in Red Square, Moscow. I asked if he still wanted to go home? He said, "No. I want to keep improving my martial arts skills."

## A Punishing Routine

In the high season, the Shaolin Kungfu Exhibition Team performs every day in the Exhibition Hall. I saw several stunning performances. Monkey Boxing and Drunken Boxing are agile. Knife, sword, spear, and club are handled wonderfully well. The most interesting acts are Luohan beating bell, Tiebushan and Ruangugong (stretching maneuver). Luohan beating bell is a difficult skill, also known as iron belly skill. The performer practises qigong (a system of deep breathing exercises). More than 10 people carrying a rough, wooden pile, and push it to the belly. The man is forced a few steps back. In ordinary cases the man would be thrown at least three metres back. Otherwise his bowels would burst. As soon as he steadied himself he stood upright. The wooden pile hit him several times. The audience became rather frightened at this spectacle. He was greeted with thunderous applause.

## A Fond Farewell

I spent three days on the mountain, attending classes, eating and resting according to the schedule. I became very spirited. I walked to the Shaolin Temple as well as Mt. Songshan after the tourists have left. The place was quiet in the twilight. I felt comforted in my heart. I used gestures, pen and paper, and facial expressions to talk with Gregory. I later learned that Gregory was injured in a car accident. He came to Shaolin to strengthen his body with martial arts. His hometown is on

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### Courses of the International Department of Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Training Centre

- **Short courses**

1. Seven-day course: Development of Shaolin Temple and Shaolin boxing. (Basic skills, Shaolin Xiao Hong boxing)
2. 15-day course: courses similar to the seven-day classes with specialized basic theory and Lohan boxing.
3. 30-day course: courses similar to 15-day classes plus Da Hong boxing and Fire Burning Club.

- **Intermediate courses**

1. 60-day course including lessons on Development of Shaolin Temple and Shaolin boxing, knowledge of Buddhism, specified martial arts courses, basic skills in Shaolin boxing, Xiao Hong boxing. Da Hong boxing, Lohan boxing, fire burning club, Shaolin single knife, knowledge on free boxing.
2. 120-day course as with 60-day course, plus conversational Chinese and daily usage, Bodhidharma sword (Shaolin sword), Shaolin Qigong (8th division in the movement), optional courses: Shaolin single knife, double knives, nine-tail whip and Taiji boxing (consisting of slow, circular movements with respiratory control or qigong).
3. 180-day course, as with 120-day course, plus paoquan or explosive boxing, long armed boxing, optional courses on Shalin single knife, nine-tail whip, convenience spade, Bodhidharma weapon, Taiji boxing and monkey boxing.

- **Special classes**

Regular short and intermediate courses as well as optional courses are offered. In addition you can choose one of the special boxing styles on the list provided by the International Department of Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Training Centre.

*Note : 1. Each course involves four hours of training everyday. Activities for morning and evening include: mountain climbing, entertainment, evening parties, meditation and sharing experiences.*
*2. If students' skills differ too greatly, special training may be planned.*

**Tuition fees per person (US$) per person per day**

| | 30 days or less | | 30 to 60 days | | Over 60 days | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Foreigner | Hong Kong、Macao、Taiwan | Foreigner | Hong Kong、Macao、Taiwan | Foreigne | Hong Kong、Macao、Taiwan |
| 10 or more | $22 | $20 | $20 | $18 | $16 | $14 |
| 6–9 people | $24 | $22 | $22 | $20 | $18 | $16 |
| 1–5 people | $30 | $28 | $26 | $24 | $24 | $22 |

*Lodging and meals are not included in tuition fees.*
Song Shang Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Training Centre
Location : 700 m east of Shaolin Temple, on Mount Songshan, Dengfeng City, Henan Province. Tel: (0371) 2749417, 2749034
Website : www.shaolinsiwushuguan.com

**1.The unimaginable stretching maneuver must be learned from childhood**
**2.Practise makes progress**
**3.Strengthening the physique under a waterfall**
**4.Gregory from Russia learns the split kick with the teacher**

the edge of Siberia, nearer to Beijing than Moscow. So he had a profound interest in Chinese culture.

As I finished the last move in Child Worshipping Buddha — the 24th movement in Xiao Hong boxing, I graduated. My teacher demonstrated the whole series again. He let me take pictures of him with my digital camera. I put my palms together and performed my ritual at the end of the class. He patted me on the shoulder and said I should exercise regularly. "Come again next year," he said. I might just do that.

*Translated by He Fei*

## Travel Tips

### ▼Getting there :

Go to Zhengzhou either by flights or buses.
From Zhengzhou to Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Training Centre, you can take a bus from the long distance passenger depot opposite Zhengzhou Railway Station to Dengfeng City at the foot of Mount Songshan. There are vans to Shaolin Temple. As soon as enough passengers are aboard, the van will leave. You can get off at the Martial Arts Training Centre near Shaolin Temple.

### ▼Accommodation :

Shaolin Wushu Hotel is in the Training Centre. It is a two-star hotel with a dining hall nearby. Standard room for two with balcony is about 200 yuan a day.

▼Your clothing should be simple and comfortable. T- shirt, long athletic trousers, and sports shoes are enough. If you have none of these, you can buy them at the martial arts institute, though this could be expensive.

# 600 years of Blue and White Porcelain History

Photos by Zi Yuan Article by Zhu Yuping

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*Blue and white porcelain is underglaze-painted in cobalt blue. The bright blue patterns and soft jade-like white glaze complement each other, giving an impression of white clouds in a blue sky.*

*The history of Chinese potters using cobalt as an ornamental material can be traced back to the Warring States Period more than 2000 years ago. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), cobalt was first used to decorate Tang tri-colour ceramics, and the blue colour of cobalt was especially rare and precious. But it was not until the Yuan Dynasty in the 13th century that the blue and white porcelain had a revolutionary breakthrough in development. The products of this period were characterised by dense ornamental patterns and bright blues. This form improved in the following two dynasties of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911).*

Tang tri-colour ceramics are roughcast and they are different from the blue and white porcelain developed later. During the later half of the 20th century, some porcelain fragments with blue patterns were discovered at the site of Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. They bore diamond patterns that are of Islamic style. According to archaeologists, this blue and white porcelain was probably produced during the Tang Dynasty during the 8th and 9th centuries. Since the characteristic glaze of these Tang blue and white porcelain was similar to that of white porcelain produced in Gongxian County, Henan Province, they are roughly determined to be

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fired in Gongxian especially for export to Islamic regions.

It is now very difficult to find blue and white porcelain produced in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In the earlier period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), blue and white porcelains were unearthed at Yangpigang in Chaozhou, Guangdong, at the base of Jinsha Tower in Longquan and at the base of Huancui Tower in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. But the colour of the blue patterns of these porcelains is not good, and the decoration technique is very primitive.

## Bold and Beautiful

In the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), Chinese territory expanded to an unprecedented scale, promoting exchanges between oriental and western civilisations. Cultural, artistic and technological exchanges facilitated amazing developments in various handicrafts in the Yuan Dynasty. Among them was the blue and white porcelain produced during the mid 14th century.

This type of blue and white porcelain is popular among collectors in Britain, the Middle East, Japan and the United States. They are characterised by being large, having dense ornamental patterns and bright colours, and looking imposing and magnificent.

Many Yuan blue and white porcelain works, small pots in particular, have been unearthed in Indonesia and the Philippines. These pots are usually 5-6 cm tall, the tallest being no more than 10 cm. Most of them have small hoops for tying a rope. They were supposed to be used as containers for areca nuts, and they have simple patterns like squares, circles, and the shapes of flowers and fruits. These are proven to be the products of Jingdezhen, in Jiangxi Province, because the same type of porcelains was also unearthed there.

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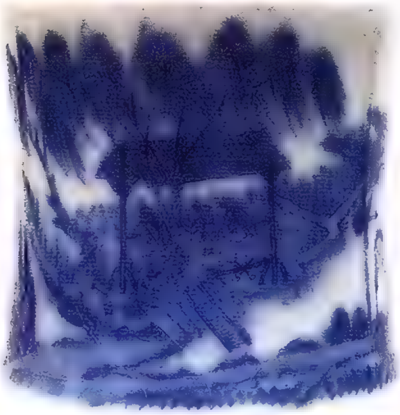
Since the 1950s, more than a hundred pieces of Yuan blue and white porcelains, most of them are small household wares, have been unearthed from tomb sites on the Chinese mainland.

Why did blue and white porcelain workmanship so quickly mature in the Yuan Dynasty? The question has aroused wide interest among archaeologists. These Yuan blue and white porcelain products had patterns painted with smalt, a type of cobalt produced in the Muslim regions of western Asia. The blue patterns are of Islamic style, and the models of these products fit the traditions of Muslim culture. They are therefore believed to be specially made for the Muslim regions. Some scholars even more boldly inferred that Muslim merchants came to Jingdezhen with the raw materials and instructed the manufacturing of such products, as there is no doubt that the Yuan blue and white porcelain works now found in western Asia were for trade.

## Refined Tastes

In the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Chinese scholar-officials and the upper classes frowned upon the blue and white porcelain, considering it too common. They fell for the elegant single-colour glazed porcelain. As a result, blue and white porcelain was seldom seen at the end of the 14th century. People at that time

1. **Blue and white porcelain pot with a lid, animal-shaped handles and patterns of clouds, dragons and peonies of the Yuan Dynasty.**
2. **A goblet with polychrome overglaze produced in the reign of Ming Emperor Chenghua.**
3. **The vase with peony patterns of the Yuan Dynasty. It was unearthed in Gao'an, Jiangxi Province.**
4. **A jar produced by a private kiln in the Ming Dynasty.**



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used white, red and blue glazed porcelain when they offered sacrifices to the gods or their ancestors. In daily life, they mainly used gold and silver vessels.

In the beginning of 15th century, Zheng He (navigator and diplomat) had made seven voyages to the Western Seas (a term used in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, referring to seas and lands west of the South China Sea or west of longitude 110°E) to befriend and promote trade with neighbouring countries. The production of blue and white porcelain started booming again. The manufacturing technology also improved greatly to become superior to Yuan products. Turkey and Persia imported many blue and white porcelain products of this period. But in the collection of China's Palace Museum, there are few blue and white porcelain items produced in this period, indicating the aristocracy at that time had not recognized its value.

## In Full Blossom

It was not until the following decade had the situation changed. The emperor at that time was a very intelligent man who loved art. He encouraged the arts both within the imperial court and among the people. Blue and white porcelain began to be widely recognised and entered a period of rapid development.

The production of blue and white porcelain in the decade was large in quantity and rich in variety. The materials for making blue and white porcelain at that time were of two types: one was imported, usually with rich, bright colours; and the other was local and greyish.

During the next 30 years from 1436 to 1465, the Ming Dynasty was troubled by internal conflicts and foreign invasions. No porcelain bearing the reign marks of the next three emperors has been found.

The blue and white porcelains produced in the 1465 to 1488 period used a kind of domestically made blue colour which contained a touch of grey, but looks very transparent. The patterns were coloured after being sketched with thin and soft lines. These items are small and as thin as paper. The layer of glaze contains very tiny bubbles that give the porcelain a soft and glossy lustre. During this period of time, doucai (blue and white porcelain that it is decorated with overglaze polychrome enamels) became popular. Doucai works can be usually found in petite, but exquisite containers and cups. The patterns include grapes, chickens and children, reminding us of the pastoral life that the men of letters in the Ming Dynasty were seeking.

## A Taste of Islam

From the blue and white porcelain of the Ming Dynasty we still can find the reflection of Islamic culture. Actually many of Yongle and Xuande works directly imitated western Asian bronzeware including kettles, flower sprayers and wine vessels. Of the Zhengde items collected in Turkey and Persia, many are decorated with Persian writing. Some products used by the Ming courts also bear the reign marks written in Persian. The culture of the western regions to a certain degree was fashionable at that time.

During the latter years of Ming Dynasty (1522-1573), the porcelain industry became more prosperous in a commodity economy. During the process of making blue and white porcelain, the division of labour became more detailed with separate specialists in drawing and colouring. This no doubt improved productivity and the quality.

Since the beginning of the 16th certury, a kind of mineral green for painting had been widely used on the blue and white porcelains of

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official court kilns. This imported pigment, which is called huiqing in China, has a slightly purple tinge. At that time, huiqing was more expensive than gold. When artisans were using it, they were always under the supervision of a specialist.

## Patterns and Shapes

The patterns of porcelain in the latter years of the Ming Dynasty no longer seemed to pay attention to the forms and shapes, and the painting techniques were no match for those in the earlier years of the Ming Dynasty. The painting tended to be over-elaborated. Offset by the blue-purple colour, the patterns give an impression of prosperity and wealth, which complies with the social and cultural conditions of the time. Emperor Jiajing was a faithful follower of Taoism, therefore the porcelain patterns bear the Taoist trademarks, featuring the Eight Immortals, cranes, glossy ganoderma (celestial herb) and the Chinese characters for fortune and longevity. The dragon, symbolizing the emperor, became a permanent subject of court blue and white porcelain.

All the emperors of the Ming Dynasty were fond of porcelain. A typical example was Emperor Wanli (1573-1620). He demanded that the utensils originally made from bamboo, wood and metals, such as big dragon-patterned vats, screens and Chinese chessboard should be made of porcelain. Owing to the difficulties in making these artifacts, the local officials had to appeal for a cut in production. But from the Wanli porcelain shafts of writing brushes, brush pots and racks, we can see the sophisticated production.

## The Artistic Peak

During the latter years of Emperor Wanli, Ming court kilns stopped making porcelain. For 60 years until the court kilns of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1919) officially went to operation in 1681, China had no court kiln. Some porcelain products for court use were ordered from private kiln. As a result, scholars call these 60 years a transition period.

Most of the blue and white porcelains produced in the transition period are of crude workmanship, which was due to economic recession at that time. The ornamental patterns on the porcelains bear the atmosphere of absurdity and desolation, featuring such subjects as solitary boats, country ferries, thatched cottages and hermits in simplified forms.

During the period of 1662-1723, blue and white porcelain art began to improve again. What was most noticeable was the superb colouring.

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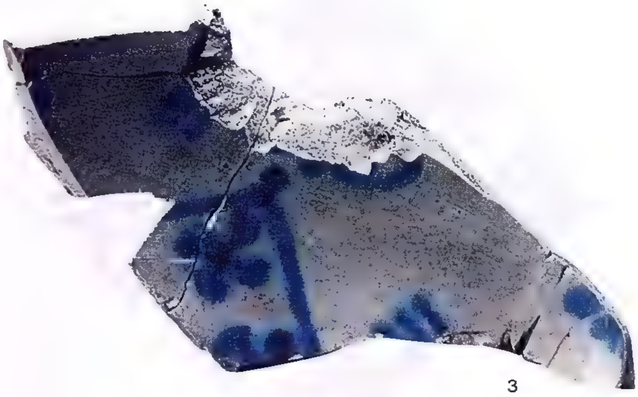
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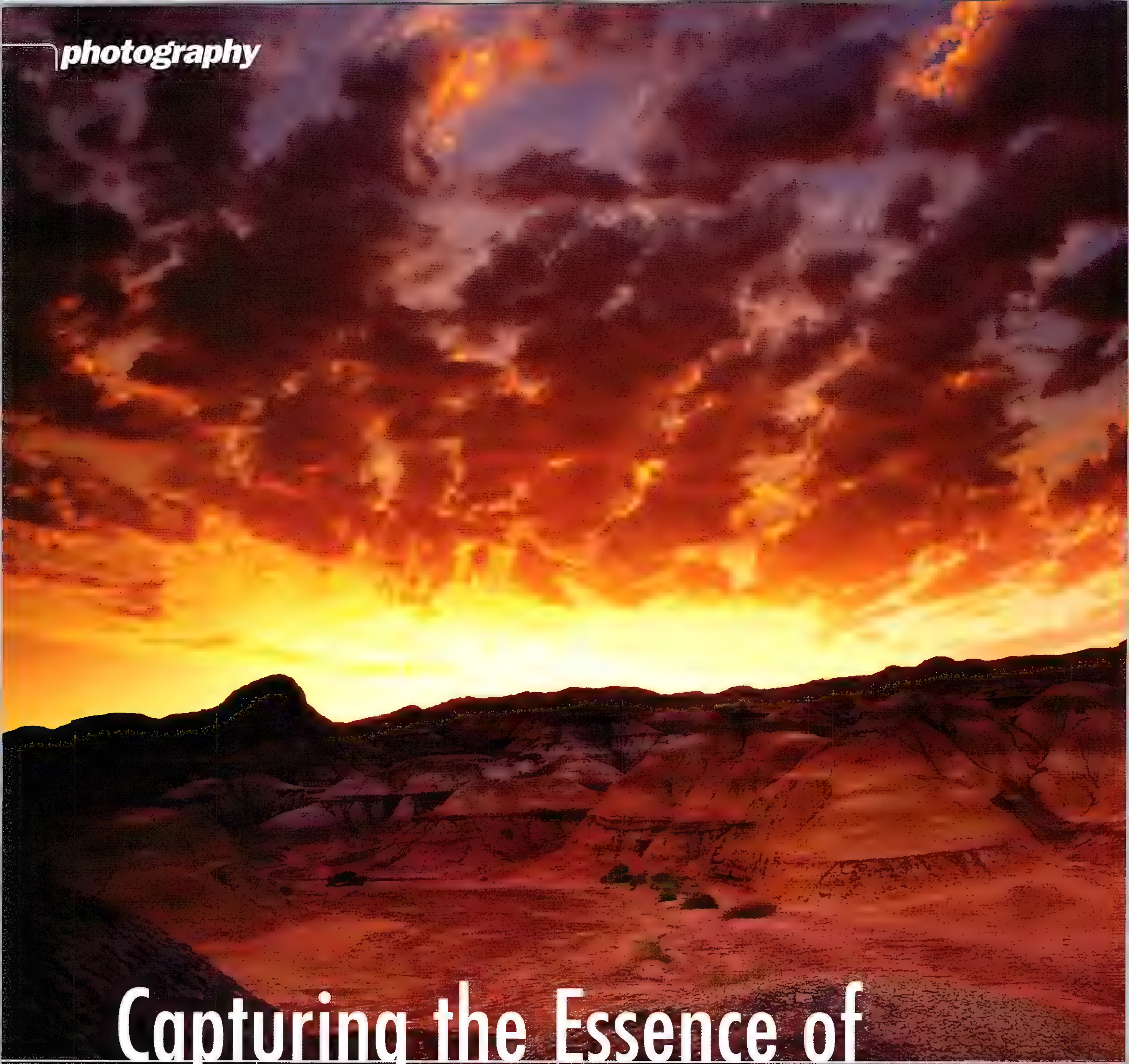
The outstanding landscape painting techniques of the four painters surnamed Wang in the earlier years of Qing Dynasty, were applied to large utensils, producing a number of paintings on porcelain.

For the next 13 years, blue and white porcelain art reached another peak. The items are vigorous, refined and elegant. The products presented a flourishing scene of prosperity. Many of the blue and white porcelain utensils during this period are imitations of those of the previous dynasty. Compared with the original works, the Qing products were more refined and exquisite in shape and painting. As the Qing works were made from different raw materials from those of Ming, they omitted the effect of those tiny iron brown spots resulting from the firing process. As a result, artificial colour application was adopted on these imitations. But artificially made dots are usually regular and distinguishable.

From 1796-1821, the production of blue and white porcelain basically followed the style of the previous period. There were top-quality products though, even there was no innovation in technology. In brief, this is how the 600-year history of Chinese ancient official court kiln production of blue and white porcelains came to an end.

*Translated by Chen Qiuping*

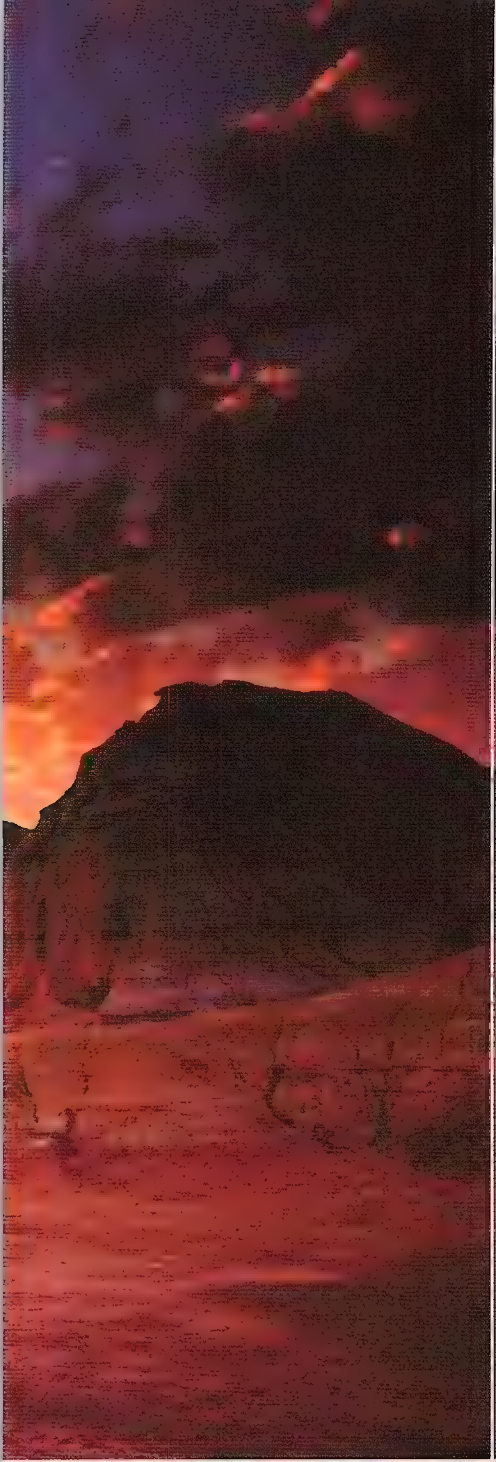
1. **A brush pot produced in the reign of Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty.**
2. **A vase produced in the reign of Emperor Daoguang of the Qing Dynasty (1821-51).**
3. **The blue and white porcelain has undergone several phrases of transformation.**
4. **Most of the blue and white porcelains produced in the transition period (1621-1681) are of crude workmanship.**



# Capturing the Essence of Xinjiang in 15 days

Photos and Article by Li Rong

**Twice I have been to Xinjiang. What I saw, however, was just scratching the surface. Yet, when glancing through the pictures from both trips, I could not suppress a euphoric mood. For southern city-dwellers, a photography trip to northwest China is costly. With its scenic spots great distances apart, travelling in Xinjiang is especially time-consuming.**



◂ Dawn in Wucai Cheng

Therefore, I combined the itineraries of my both trips and came up with a "Golden Route" covering the most areas in the shortest time — 15 days.

**Region:** Northern Xinjiang

**Season:** Early Fall

**The best period for photography:** Mid-September to early October

**Route:** Urumqi → Wucai Cheng (Multicoloured City)→ Altay → Buerjin → Ertix River Valley → River Hemu → Lake Kanas → Baihaba Village → Baihualin (White Birch) Park → Mogui Cheng (Devil City) → Lake Sailimu → Tian Chi (Heaven Pool) → Urumqi

**Preparations:** When travelling a vast region like Xinjiang, you have to make sure that your vehicle has plenty of space and is well equipped. Don't travel on your own. Ideally, it's safer to rent two cars and travel with a group of eight, including drivers. The first things to sort out, therefore, are: cars, drivers and guides. You can get help from travel agents in Urumqi.

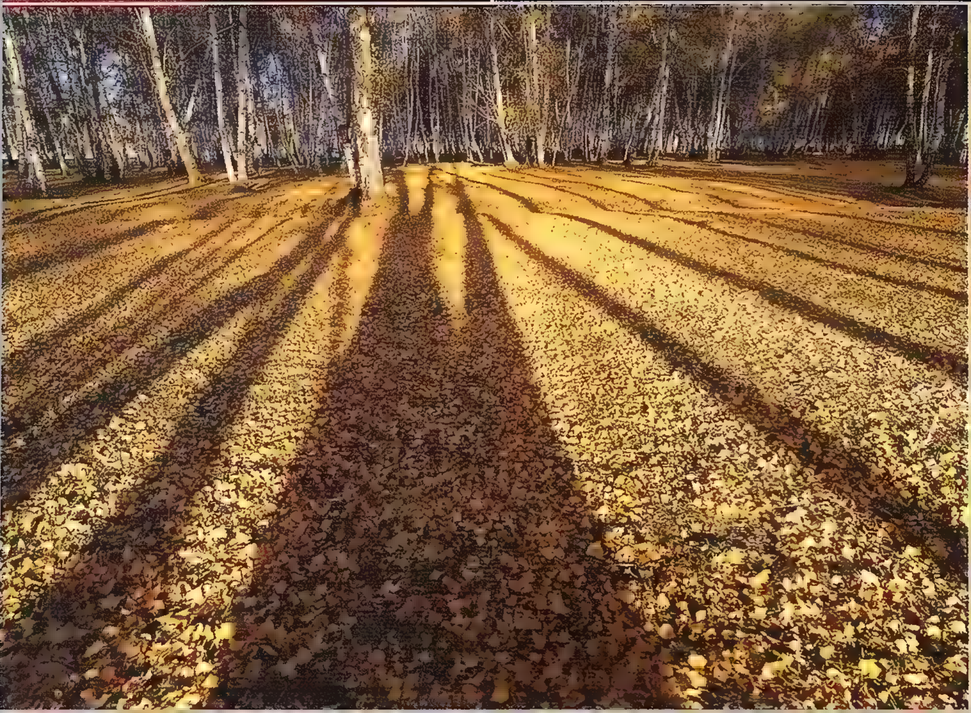
**Things to bring:** Because of the extreme temperatures, you will need a down jacket, thermal underwear, hat, gloves, waterproof boots, thick socks, paper towels, sleeping bag, tent, thermos flask, dry foodstuff, compass and torch. Your luggage should be small to medium sized, lest the car is overloaded.

**Photography equipment:** I prefer a medium format camera to a 135 camera because it takes better pictures of landscapes. If possible, bring an extra camera just in case. As for lenses, I took a 35mm, 45mm, 80mm, 140mm and 210mm, together with a 1.4X Tele Converter.

A lens flare and tripod are must-haves. Don't forget your polarising lens flare, ESP metre, a quick release mounting plate, batteries and other accessories. You don't want to ruin your journey because of the one or two forgotten items.

**Film:** I chose Kodak E100 vs for its warm tone that could best present the autumnal atmosphere. Prepare 8 rolls per day and it should be more than enough.

▾ Sunset in the birch woods at Kanas



▾ Villagers at Hemu

**White birch woods in Kanas ▶**

**Day 1** Depart Urumqi at 8 a.m. for Fu Kang. Along the petroleum highway, you will enter the desert highway and pass through two petroleum supply bases: Cainan and Huoshao Shan (Burning Hill). After 28 km along the desert highway, turn down the Gobi road. It will be late when you reach the scenic region, so camp the night there.

**Day 2** You will never forget waking up the next morning, feeling as if you're on another planet.

When photographing the landscape of Yadan, compose the pictures with a sense of the sublime before releasing your shutter. Early in the morning or at night, the lower angled sidelight can provide the most dramatic effects. For instance, the elongated shadow and deep colour of mountains will give you a strong 3-D effect. Remember to make sure the depth of field has been adjusted appropriately, so that the foreground will be clear. Rest at noon, as you still have another battle to fight at sunset. Camp for the night.

**Day 3** After taking pictures of the morning light at Wucai Cheng, you may, with luck, see herds of endangered wild antelopes. Driving along National Highway 216, you will pass through Junggar Basin as well as Beitun Town, and reach Altay at about 6 p.m. Replenish your supplies that evening. Camp at Altay.

**Day 4** Visit Ertix River Valley in Buerjin County in the morning. The wide and deep river valley distinguishes itself with the Yadan landscape to the north. Be very careful of its dangerous landscape. Don't ever forget the stunning sunset in the river valley. Spend the night in Buerjin.

**Day 5** Leave Buerjin in the morning. On your way, you will see a spectacular desert, which could easily gobble up an hour of photography. Hit the road and try to make it to River Hemu by 9 p.m.

**Day 6** Spend the whole day at the village of River Hemu and try to take pictures of this awe-inspiring poem: the yellow-leaf-covered ground, a beam of sunlight seeping out of the white birch woods, the village houses made of rounded timber by the Kazakhstan border, the cheerful village children, the misty smoke from chimneys of houses, sheep led home by a shepherd...

**Day 7** Leave the village of River Hemu at around 11a.m., and go to Lake Kanas. The streams and woods of birch on the way will captivate you. Arrive at Kanas around 6 p.m.

**Day 8~9** Take pictures in the scenic region of Kanas. The many scenic spots there require two days to cover. Places like Crouching Tiger Bay, Moon Bay, and Fairy Bay are all breathtaking, permeated with grace and gentleness. Only at noon, you may find the light at Crouching Tiger Bay unsuitable; try 9 a.m. or 4 p.m. instead, as both times are awesome. If using a polarising filter, make sure you adjust it properly so that you won't leave out the mountain reflections on the water. On my stay at Kanas, I got the pictures I had longed for.

**Day 10** Leave for Baihaba Village in the morning, and you should be there by 2 p.m. Try to get a taste of the Kazak life. You may not want to leave afterwards. The Kazaks' sharp features make portraiture promising.

**Day 11** White Birch Park, 10 km from Baihaba Village. Try to reach the park before daybreak, so you can see how the shadows of the tree trunks are cast on the ground covered by yellow leaves, with the sun rising gently. The shadows will draw interesting lines and make the composition of your photos very diverse. Leave before noon and you should be in Buerjin in the evening.

▲ Mogui Cheng

▲ River Valley at Ertix

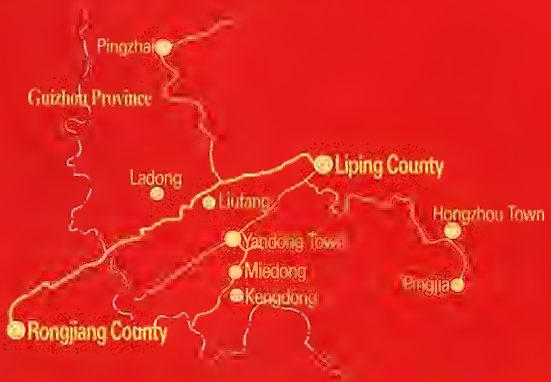
**Day 12** Leave Buerjin in the morning, and spend the night at Karamay.

**Day 13** Shoot at Mogui Cheng. Although the town does not have the colours of Wucai Cheng, the hills are higher and more rugged, giving a great sense of strength. Leave the area by noon, and pass through Kuitun later in the evening. Then you should make it for dinner by Lake Sailimu. Leave the lake at noon the next day and go to Shihezi. At 7:30 p.m, you will arrive at Shihezi and dine there.

**Day 14** Go to Tianchi. The silhouette of the mountains together with the charm of the lake dotted by herds of sheep-all melt into a picture. You can return to Urumqi in the afternoon.

*Translated by Dora Tsang*

What better occasion than the Chinese New Year to experience the hospitality and friendliness of the people of Dong nationality in Guizhou Province? Guests are fought over to attend lavish banquets as villages compete to put on the best festivities with endless music, spirited dancing and a plethora of exciting events.


Pingzhai
Guizhou Province
Ladong
Liufang
Liping County
Hongzhou Town
Yandong Town
Miedong
Kengdong
Pingjia
Rongjiang County

1

# The Battle of the Celebrations

Photos & Article by Yang Bin

2

During the 2003 Spring Festival, we ventured out to Liping County of Guizhou Province and spent the festive season with the Dong.

Our journey began in Kaili. It took us eight hours to travel the 272 km on the icy country highway before we arrived at the Liping Hotel.

## Hospitality Wars

In the morning, we drove directly to Zhainan Village — about 30 km from Liping County. There are four native villages within Zhainan, with over 120 households. It is an entirely Dong population of more than 560. Here, the celebrations start on the third day of the Lunar New Year.

When we arrived at Zhainan Village, the elders were chatting in the drum tower. Singing could be heard from next door, in the two-storey theatre, where elaborately dressed girls were rehearsing their acts. Holding hands in a circle, they went through their dancing and singing routines.

During the Spring Festival, Zhainan custom is that every village takes turns in hosting a meal. This time it was Liufang Village's turn. We were invited to join the elders and other villagers, to visit Liufang and eat with the locals.

After breaking the silence with the boom of iron cannons and the crack of fireworks, the procession set off. The village elders led the way, while cadres and performers followed, and the rest fell in behind.

The friendly villagers of Liufang had been waiting at the entrance for some time. Our contingent had hardly set foot in the village before they rushed toward us. The custom dictates that whoever invites the most guests is the most hospitable and generous. So it is a fierce and sometimes amusing battle between all the families in town to "grab" guests. We were the "prize" for a villager named Yang Tongyong.

Yang Tongyong's family managed to "get" three tables of guests. By the time I sat down and checked out the smorgasbord now before me, I realized that the fare would make a vegetarian faint — poultry, fish, meat, everything but the green stuff. We were just about to ask our hosts for something slightly more diet-friendly, when our guides told us that vegetables had no place on the table that day. Any family that served vegetables is ridiculed for their lack of generosity and cheap hospitality.

In the afternoon, people began to congregate before the drum tower, where religious rituals, group singing, and Dong operas were due to start.

The women danced around the men, who played lusheng reed pipes. Afterwards, the elders brought everyone to the altar, where the lusheng was played and firecrackers lit.

After the ceremony, the "farewell" wine was put out at the village gate to toast everyone goodbye as they went to watch Dong opera in Zhainan.

1. **A Dong girl all dressed up**
2. **Qiansan descendants on parade led by the village elders**
3. **Families off to visit relatives**
4. **Zhainan villagers watch a Dong opera**

## Dancing in the Drum Tower

At 9 a.m., we set off from the county of Liping and arrived at Yandong Village of Yandong Town 50 minutes later, the young men and women dressed in their finest were waiting at the village entrance—with their persuasive drinking songs, we couldn't but oblige and drink the rice wine. Then we were led to the drum tower, where young men were practicing the *Shengs* (Chinese reed instrument). The village elders were discussing celebrations around the bonfire near the drum tower. Parents dressed their sons and daughters in their best clothes and guests from nearby villages gradually made their way to the drum tower in small and large groups.

By 2 p.m., the drum tower was full of people and the streets packed with revelers. A grand symphony of firecrackers, cannons, drums and gongs, the sound of the lusheng, the clang of girls' silver jewellery as they danced, and the Dong songs from the speakers... the carnival just had begun! Young men with their gongs, drums and lusheng pipes walked in front, followed by women dressed in their best clothes. The whole procession headed to the altar, the flowerbed in front of the town hall building. When everyone was standing before the altar, they held hands and chanted words of worship led by the elders. After circling the altar a few times, the women retreated and the men continued the ceremony.

After the religious ritual, the drum tower livened up again, and men and women of marriageable age started their courtship singing and this continued until sunset.

Yandong is also famous for the single-pillar drum tower of Shudong. The Shudong drum tower was built in 1636 and made its way into the Guinness Book of Records in 1999.

## Young Love Amid the Fireworks

There are as many Dong celebrations as there are villages, each different from the other. We heard that there would be celebrations held in Kangdong, Shuangjiang Township, and therefore, we decided to drive over.

The fifth and sixth days of the New Year are the happiest for the young people of Miedong. On the fifth day, the young men of the lower village invite girls of the upper village to dance, while the next day is the upper village boys' turn to invite the lower village girls to dance. We arrived on the sixth day, and the youths of the lower village were making their way to the upper village led by their elders amid the music of gongs, drums and the lusheng pipes. My curiosity was piqued when I found a few cross-dressing men in the group. The locals told me that they must have several young men dressed as women, otherwise a sheep must be offered as penalty.

At the upper village, the young men and women quickly joined in. The "village parade" consisted of firecrackers and music as the contingent walked along. The entire procession was over 100 m long and a grand sight to behold.

## Falsetto Harmonies

Pingjia is a Dong village to the south of Liping County, only 11 km from Hongzhou town, but the awful roads mean it is a drive of over an hour.

Pingjia is well known for its *pipa* songs, with their harmonious melodies. The Pingjia locals add their own touch, singing the Pipa songs in falsetto — both men and women, creating tunes that sound clear and tender. It is said that they were originally love songs between young men and women sung at night, but, worried that their parents would overhear, they sang in falsetto to disguise their voices, which led to the creation of a unique singing style.

Afternoon is show time. On the sandbanks next to the river, all villages took turns performing. The acts were unpretentious and had a rural charm all their own.

The Village Oval set the scene for the night's festival dinner, the biggest party you've ever seen, crammed with tables, overflowing with people from all the villages.

## The Home of a Master

After lunch in Maogong, we headed for Ladong Village via Dimen. Ladong Village is home of the founding father of Dong opera — Wu Wencai. Here we were lucky enough to visit the former residence of Master Wu, a wooden two-storey building with three rooms, but it was old and dilapidated. The building was still home to another family named Wu, and upstairs we found a room where the Wu Wencai artifacts were displayed. Sadly there weren't many items and the lighting was poor. We were lucky enough to see Wu Wencai's hand-written Dong opera scripts at the village secretary's house, but many pages were missing.

## The Grand Reunion of Dimen

"Qiansan Festival" is the grandest celebration of Dimen Village. In the old days, Dimen had over 1,300 households, but the size of the population led to problems, so the elders decided that the occupants would be split into several villages. Aside from 300 households in Dimen, the others are in places such as Maogong, Ladong, and Luoda. The first to the 15th days of first lunar month were designated the period for Dimen's sons and daughters to reunite and pay their respects to their ancestors. It wasn't long before "Qiansan Festival" became a tradition.

The day was cold. At 11a.m., a group of young men and women laid out tables with rice wine, dried fish, and other dishes to welcome guests from afar. The guests were, as usual, welcomed with lusheng music, joyous singing, firecrackers and of course, toasts of wine at the entrance to the village.

Lunch over, everyone gathered at the head of the Fengyu Bridge, where the parade around the fields next to the village would start, led by the village elders. Being the cultural epicentre of the Dong ethnic minority, the elders of Dimen are fastidious in their attire. Dressed in emerald or blue robes topped with silver vests, the leader wears a dragon-embroidered red robe and holds a red umbrella. When he walks, the procession follows, when he stops everyone stops. After a few laps, everyone came to the altar, where the elders formed a line and burnt incense to remember the ancestors.

*Translated by Cheng Lei*

1. **Miedong upper village youths visit the lower village. Every group must include a man in a woman's dress, otherwise a sheep must be offered as penalty.**
2. **Pingjia's Dong girls lay down weaving mills and grass-woven signs, raising toasts to welcome guests.**
3. **At New Year, groups of Dong people parade around the villages accompanied by lusheng music.**

## Dong Choral Music

The choirs of the Dong people are renowned as a multi-part acapella singing group. The choir comprises dozens of people, sometimes even hundreds. Usually performed at the drum tower in Dong villages, the singing is characterized by smooth delivery and clarity of enunciation, typical of chamber music. Historical records of the "Dong Choir" date back to the Song Dynasty. When the records were discovered in the 1950s, they refuted the claim that there was no multi-part choir singing to be found in Chinese folk music. The choral music of the Dong people has been submitted to UNESCO for consideration as an intangible cultural heritage.

# To Calcutta With Love

*Article by Zhu Jie (Photos provided by Ye Pei)*

**In the "House for the Dying" in Calcutta, India, founded by Mother Teresa, people can find a Hong Kong woman with a beautiful smile shuttling among the patients with incurable diseases. She is a full-time volunteer and this is her fifth year working there. She sings, chats with patients and laughs sometimes while she is busy with her work. How did she come to India to work in the "House for the Dying" from far away Hong Kong? The answer lies in a book introduced by two German sisters she met on her travels.**

Ye Pei — her friends called her Apei — has bright eyes and a friendly smile that infuse others with happiness. She lost her parents when she was a child. So she learned to be independent, strong and free. She studied archaeology in a mainland university. Excavation all the time in many parts of China aroused her interests in travel. After graduation, she travelled, working her way through foreign lands. She travelled in the grasslands and deserts of Africa and the cities and towns of Central and South America and usually spent six months or a year abroad. Now she devotes her heart and soul to voluntary work in India because of a meeting with two German sisters on her journeys.

"I travelled in Central and South America for the whole of 1994. One day I got to know two German sisters. They recommended the book 'City of Joy' written by a priest from Poland and they were quite sure that the book would affect my attitude towards life. They also told me of their experience working in the orphanage founded by Mother Teresa in Calcutta. I did not pay much attention to what they said at the time."

"One day at the end of 1998, I suddenly remembered the book recommended by the German sisters so I began to read it. As soon as I started I could not stop reading.

The impoverished people in Calcutta appeared before my eyes and I was deeply touched by the hard lives of the poor people described in the book. I finished reading the book in two weeks and it seemed that I was called to India."

"At that moment I thought that I had lived 20 years without problems since I entered university and now it was the time to give something back. I thought how wonderful it would be to serve those poor people and bring warmth and love to them. So I made up my mind to do that and quit my job immediately."

"I was in the 'House for the Dying' in 1999 and about four or five days later a nun asked me to help her wash the body of a dead person. I was told that the Indians believe the dead could only be accepted in Heaven if the body was cleaned after death. Cleaning the body is one of the jobs in the House. I was not afraid of death, but I was afraid of hurting her because I always thought the dead could still feel my touch. That was the first time I touched a corpse."

Apei has seen many things in the last five years that other people could only imagine.

"I was educated from childhood with the idea that when you do things you have to consider the gain and loss. But the House for the Dying teaches me to love people unconditionally. Sometimes the patients can't even say 'Thank you', but they inspire me greatly."

"In the past I was afraid of nothing, but being stuck with disability some day. I thought I would lose my dignity if I were bedridden and had to be cared for by others. But since I have worked in the House for the Dying, I have a new understanding for disability.

"I once took care of a paralysed patient for a long time in the House so I was thoroughly familiar with her every little movement. When she turned her head or blinked her eyes I knew the meaning. One day I was busy with the other patients when a new volunteer noticed her make an unusual expression, but she did not know what the patient wanted. So she came up to me for help. Then I told her she wanted to relieve herself so the newcomer gave her the bedpan. That was exactly what she had wanted. The newcomer was surprised to see I knew so much. After that, I realized that it was because she had been in bed for so long that I knew and understood her so well. I also learned something from seeing her endure such pain silently. A paralysed person can still value life and bring happiness to others. So from then on I stopped worrying about disability myself."

"I have also learned how to offer appropriate assistance rather than being too helpful. For example, an old woman sold flowers in a market near the House with her grandson, a six-year old boy with infantile paralysis, and they slept in the open. The boy could only crawl on his hands and legs. After sometime the old woman sent the boy to the House because she wanted her grandson to live a good life and she could not take care of him all the time as she got older by the day. My boyfriend, an Indian volunteer, took him to the hospital for a check-up

1. **The "House for the Dying" in Calcutta, India, founded by Mother Teresa**
2. **Getting on very well with locals**
3. **The volunteers are washing clothing and other article of daily use for patients**

and had special shoes and crutches made for him, so he could stand and walk. One day we learned that he had limped around a market and many people gave him money because they took pity on him. If a little boy like him could get money so easily by pretending to be pitiful, why would he still think about reading books, working hard or self-reliance? At that time, one of my British friends had just built a Centre for Disabled Persons. I immediately took the boy to the centre where special nurses would care for him and he would receive physical therapy."

> The volunteers are ordinary people with all the usual human frailties. They must learn to confront and rediscover themselves in the face of so much suffering.

"All the volunteers begin voluntary work with an unsophisticated mind. But with the passage of time our weaknesses are exposed. I am no exception.

"Once the BBC came to film and some volunteers showed exceptional care for the patients, holding their hands and asking about their health. Others who usually did not work very hard also kept busy that day. I was also no better, pretending to be warm-hearted by massaging patients attentively so as to give people an impression that I was professional in the job. But this was just selfishness.

"In the past I really used to resent being called lazy. The work times in the House are from eight to twelve in the morning and from three to six in the afternoon. At first I worked the whole day and was always the first there. After a while I felt very tired, so I decided to work in the morning because there was more work to do and more volunteers working then. In order to show that I had exerted my utmost in front the others I undertook the task of washing all the sheets. There were about 50 patients in the House at that time and so I washed sheets the whole morning everyday. But soon I was worn out. Then I realized that I would harm myself if I continued that way. I was full of enthusiasm, but it seemed that I had got lost. I asked myself about the purpose of the work, whether it was for others, myself or for the patients. So from then on I worked flexible hours. Sometimes I won't go to work when I feel tired or bad tempered as I can't offer a good service to the patients.

"The volunteers came from around the world and from all walks of life. Knowing these people has broadened my outlook and mind.

"A German volunteer used to be a banker and lived a life of luxury and dissipation, working Monday to Friday and flying to Las Vegas to gamble at the weekend. When he parted from his girlfriend, he became depressed so he went travelling for a change of scenery. He met Mother Teresa in Calcutta by chance and she invited him to work for three weeks as a volunteer. At the beginning, he doubted whether he could work there for three days. But who would think that he has worked there for 14 years? Now he is living in a house that is cheaper than mine without lavatory and running water and spends less than 18 rupees (about three Hong Kong dollars) on dinner. He pays little attention to what others may think.

"Another volunteer, Albert, was enormously successful when he was young and planned to retire at 40 and travel around the world. After he met Mother Teresa he went to work as a volunteer after 40. Now he is over 60 and often drives to the railway station to look for patients. He carries them to the car by himself and brings them back to the House.

"Once I went out with Albert and we carried a patient to the car. After that I found insects all over me. Once Albert carried a poisoned person to the car and inflammation appeared on his hands. Not long after his hands were ulcerated. Afterwards I gave him a pair of gloves, but he refused to wear them because he worried that the patients would feel embarrassed if he wore them. He also contracted a pulmonary disease while nursing the patients.

1. **The streets of Calcutta**
2. **The Sisters of the "House for the Dying"**
3. **Collecting donation**
4. **The cat raised by Apei was once critically ill**

Eventually eight percent of his lung had to be removed, but he still enjoys attending to the patients."

The volunteers are not immune to illness themselves. They must pay great attention to their own actions.

"Our work exposes us to many diseases, especially tuberculosis because the majority of TB patients of India are in Calcutta. I am quite lucky that I have not had any serious illness so far. Many volunteers have been infected because of carelessness or paying too little attention to personal hygiene. For example, a girl from Poland, my former roommate, has been infected with hepatitis, malaria, TB and other illnesses because she did not open the windows or turn on the fan to circulate the air on hot summer days when the temperature hits 40°C. She was used to eating frozen food as soon as she got home. In another example, 15 volunteers, in order to live a simple life like Mother Teresa, lived together in a small room with a rent of only 60 rupees (15 Hong Kong dollars), sharing a public bathroom and eating simple food. Many of them felt ill because of malnutrition and too little rest."

"I think that we have to do things the right way. You and others will suffer more when you catch some infectious diseases. It is most important to take good care of yourself. In fact, if preventive measures are taken, many diseases can be avoided. I built a bathroom outside my home, everyday when I go home I have a shower before entering and leave all my work clothes outside. In addition, I often open the windows and turn on the fan to circulate the air. I try my best to maintain a balanced diet and get enough rest. In this way I am not prone to fall ill."

Volunteers in the "House for the Dying" earn no pay or subsidies. They live entirely on their own money.

"I spend two thousand Hong Kong dollars each month on my house and food. Usually my younger sister sends money and sometimes my friends also give me some. I can earn some money by working several months in Hong Kong when I go back to renew my visa every year. This way I can return the money I borrow from my sister and friends. Sometimes I really have no money to give them, so I assure them that I will have money some day and return it to them for sure. I have no worries about money because I firmly believe that Heaven will give you your due, which has been proved by my past experiences."

*Translated by Wang Zengfen*

Apei said that she was born to love freedom and lack of constraint. She believed in no religion, but she believed in fate. Asked how long she would work in India, she pointed to the sky and said it would be decided by her boss — Heaven — and she, herself, did not know. She had no fear of growing old without money. She said that she could earn money by writing articles if she kept up with her mental faculties.

## The Missionaries of Charity

The Missionaries of Charity, which runs the "House for the Dying" and the Orphanage, is a charitable institution established by Mother Teresa in Calcutta. The "House for the Dying" gives helpless and seriously ill people care, love and dignity. The Missionaries of Charity welcome volunteers from around the world, from different races and religions. They can freely choose the service place and time. If you want to sign up, you can register at the office in Calcutta during business hours.

**Address:** The Missionaries of Charity, 54A, Acharya Jagadish Chandra
Bose Road, Calcutta 700 016, India

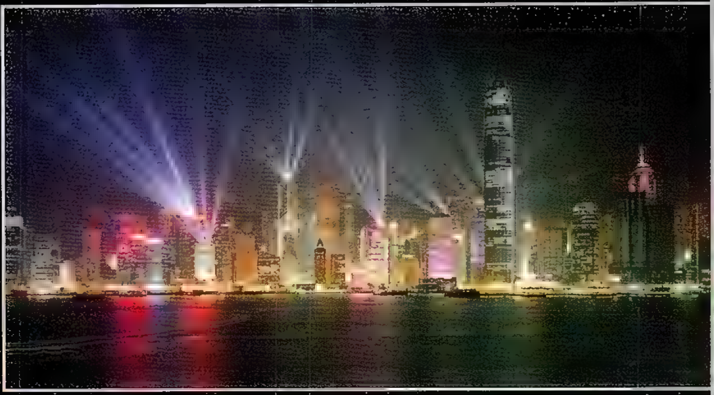
**Tel:** (091-033) 2452277 . 2491400

**Office time:** Six to twelve in the morning and three to seven in the afternoon from Monday to Sunday (except Thursday)

## Postscript :

Apei said that when she left Hong Kong for India it was easy to give up her job and all her belongings — except for her group of dogs and cats. "I spent three months looking for homes for the four cats and six dogs. But finally I found homes only for three dogs, and I had to put the four cats and three dogs to sleep, which was a bitter decision. But I had no other choice. I asked myself if I would make the same decision again, and the answer is 'yes'. If I did not go to India I would give my love only to the cats and dogs. Since I am in India, I give my love to many people. Including some who were only loved once in their lives for a short time, sometimes a month, a week or only one day. Then they leave the world."

# Symphony of Lights



Photos by Chan Yat Nin Article by Maggie Lam

For decades, HK's trademark image has been the old wooden fishing boats sailing in front of the cramped waterfront commercial district with soaring skyscrapers of glass and steel; such exotic contrast was like a tourist magnet that drew throngs of visitors. But since the beginning of this Chinese New Year, HK has a new permanent landmark. Gone are the fishing boats, traditional sampans and wallah wallahs, and now on with the new sophisticated multi-media light and sound show featuring the 18 world-class buildings on the HK Island.

## Let There be Lights!

Aside from being the tax-free shopping paradise, HK has the most spectacular night scene of the world. Tourism Commission came up with an innovative idea that shows off HK's gorgeous harbour and top-notch skyscrapers with an 18-minute presentation starting at 8 p.m. every night, namely "A Symphony of Lights". (Rooftop pyrotechnic displays may be staged to complement the light presentation on special occasions only.)

The dynamic program features the combination of exceptional music and lighting effect, enhancing HK's already mesmerizing night vista. By bringing the focus back to the buildings, the show lets the architectures reveal the energy of the city.

Since the music and the lighting have to compliment each other, the soundtrack is written specifically for the lighting program. And to ensure all 18 buildings' lights orchestra can achieve perfect harmony, the program is fully computerised and automated, with the help of some state-of-theart technologies such as atomic clock and pyro-digital machines. Due to the position of light beams, the best place to enjoy the show is at the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront outside the HK Cultural Centre (Kowloon Peninsula).

## Let the Spirit Lives on!

If "A Symphony of Lights" were merely the latest high-tech tourism gimmick, then the presentation would not be as well received. But speculators are mostly moved by the tremendous effort of delivering the production, which demonstrates the strength and spirits of HK people.

When the Tourism Commission first launched the idea in March last year and started to seek partnership with the private sectors, HK was going through the toughest time of the decades: The unemployment rate was sky-rocket; the whole city was threatened by the then-mysterious epidemic SARS; and last but not least, the crumbling of the property and stock markets.

Despite the dire situations, these private corporations were still ready to bet on HK's future, believing that the city would rebound soon. That was why they were willing to cover all the lighting installation expenses. And without their faithful investment, the presentation will not become the proud symbol of HK's success and confidence in the future.

## 18 Participating Buildings

**Bank of China Tower** The Bank of China Tower is a masterpiece of the world famous architect Mr. I M Pei. The Tower's unique feature is a harmonious blend of modern architecture with traditional Chinese design, and has received a number of international and Hong Kong architectural design awards.

**Central Plaza** A deluxe Grade A office complex, this 75-storey structure offers world class interior and exterior designs. The glittering gold and silver double-glazed facade of the building lights up the exciting island harbour front.

**Cheung Kong Center** The 70-storey Cheung Kong Center serves as the headquarters of Cheung Kong Limited and a HK based multi-national conglomerate which operates in about 40 countries across the globe.

**Harcourt House** The building possesses an impressive appearance; its modern design with a traditional elegance has won the HK Institute of Architects' Silver Medal Award.

**HK City Hall** The City Hall was built in a classic Bauhaus style, representing a bold deviation from the Victorian design concepts predominant in the 50s.

**HK Convention and Exhibition Centre** Being one of the world's largest curved roof structures, HK Convention and Exhibition Centre's distinguished flowing architectural lines make it a splendid counterpoint to the vertical cityscape of Wanchai.

The Centre hosts more than 2,000 events a year, and has staged many of the world's most prestigious international meetings and other major cultural and entertainment events.

**HSBC Main Building** In the 138 years of its existence, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation has established four successive headquarters at Central. Each set new standards of design, construction and technology, but none more so than the present building designed by Norman Foster and completed in 1985. This building is said to be one of the finest and most innovative bank buildings in the world.

**Jardine House** As HK's first skyscraper, and with its distinctive circular windows, Jardine House has long remained HK landmark. The round "moon gate" windows hold an honoured place in Chinese architectural tradition and offer refreshing views of Victoria Harbour and The Peak.

**MassMutual Tower** Formally known as the Fleet House and used to be the clubhouse for the British Navy, the building was acquired by the Chinese Estates Holdings Ltd. in the last 80s. In mid-1995, extensive alteration and renovation work was carried out to the building and facade, which led to the external appearance at present.

**One & Two Exchange Square** Widely-recognised as one of HK's finest architectural statements, the buildings have come to symbolize prestige, functionality and quiet elegance. The alternating bands of Italian granite and silver reflective glass, paired with the swirling curves and distinctive edges of their sculptured facsade, make the buildings some of the most memorable in Central.

**One & Two International Finance Centre** The complex is set to be a unique combination of prestigious offices, high-end shopping and entertainment, along with the world's finest hotel, all under one roof. While the One IFC was completed in 1998, construction of Two IFC was completed in late 2003. 420 m in height with 88 storeys, it is the tallest building with the most impressive city and harbour views in HK. The world-renowned architect Cesar Pelli designs the building with a simple, strong and memorable presence.

**Queensway Government Offices** The High Block and Low Block were built in 1986 and 1985 respectively. Two offices under the Security Bureau and 16 government departments are accommodated here.

**Sun Hung Kai Centre** The structure was completed in 1981, and it enjoys a stunning 270-degree view of the harbour, as well as close proximity to the Cross Harbour Tunnel for added transport convenience.

**The Center** This 80-storey skyscraper is completed in 1998, and it has made significant contribution to improving the surrounding environment. The plush foliage and special water features in its entrance concourse present a much-appreciated urban oasis in the midst of HK's bustling commercial district.

**The Chinese People's Liberation Army Forces HK Building** The building now houses the Chinese PLA Forces HK, a symbol of Chinese sovereignty and the guards of HK. The building has a wine-glass look, and this glass is filled with the blessings of the members of the Chinese PLA Forces to the HK people.

**The HK Academy for Performing Arts** The Academy building, designed by a HK based architectural firm, is considered to be amongst the best in the world for its design and equipment. It contains a complex of sophisticated venues, specially built for a variety of productions and audience sizes.

# PIRATE CAVES AND ISLAND TREASURES: CHEUNG CHAU, HONG KONG

*Photos & Article by Tony Henderson*

It's a lovely day, "Let's go to one the Outlying Islands," your best friend says. Without doubt, the best place to visit is Cheung Chau Island, particularly if the day is already chasing at your heels....

1

The Hong Kong Central Ferries offer both the high-speed catamaran, which only takes half-an-hour, and the slower three-decker ferry, to Cheung Chau. Both sights en route — the view of Victoria coastline, the Green Island with its charming lighthouse, and those high rising chimneys rather far off on Lamma Island — are splendid. The flying-over-the-sea jetfoils that zoom into view every few minutes are traversing the route between Hong Kong and Macao, bringing energy to the ocean. On the starboard side, one would find the gigantic lotus-seated bronze Buddha statue on the peak of the largest island of Hong Kong, Lantau. Otherwise in view are the tops of apartment blocks across on the Kowloon side, and the swinging cranes of the container terminal, which are most likely half hidden in the typical mists that seem to constantly lie across Hong Kong's inner waters.

Finally, the ferry swings into the busy pretty harbour that lined with deep-sea fishing vessels, fireboats, oilers, sampans, wallah wallahs and sundry.

Despite its small size, Cheung Chau Island holds the largest population of all the outlying islands (beside the newly developed Discovery Bay on Lantau Island with its urbanised sprawl). The hills on the island are all dotted with homes! It used to be an onerous task to build on hillsides, therefore, everyone built homes that are up to three stories tall, and "packed them as tightly as sardines".

Since Cheung Chau is a fishing community, the inhabitants there stick

3

together despite their different regional backgrounds. The island is filled with clan meeting rooms and ancestor halls. It is surprising to find how many disparate group are scattered throughout this really small island. To see just how many different groups there are, it is best to pay a visit during the Ta Chiu or Bun Festival. One will certainly be impressed by the many different floats, costumes, and Cantonese Opera shows.

The joyful antics of the Bun Festival mostly take place in the forecourt of Pak Tai Temple — the Palace of the Jade Void. Known as the Ruler of the Dark Heavens, Pak Tai is the Emperor of the North. The people who carry out the festive ceremony would all dressed appropriately for some centuries previous as the guards of honour. They would then carry and accompany the god statues and sacred implements belonging to lesser temples, as well as the street and neighbourhood associations, to pay respects to Pak Tai.

There is another popular meander for visitors, and it is located at the more distant end of the island on the opposite side — the cave of pirate Cheung Po Chai. To get there, it is best approached via Sai Wan Village, accessed by a wallah wallah, which only takes five minutes and costs about HK $5 per person.

If it is a school's holiday, one can expect a band of cheeky young ones proffer electric torches for a small fee at the cave entrance. Better hire one as the cave has narrow confines, and it starts with a six-foot drop!

From that side of the island, there is a pleasant walk back to downtown along the Peak Road, with views down into curving bays that look the very thing of a pirate lore.

The seafood is superb on Cheung Chau, and the number of seafood restaurants here is overwhelming these days. The cuisines are not cheap, but they are absolutely fresh. One can pick a live fish by the door of the restaurant, or anywhere along the quayside, and have it cooked within mere minutes.

The local's favourite beach is Kwun Yam Wan, which is at the far end (Pearl River side) of the beach past the Water Sports and Wind Surfing Centre. There, it has a breezy restaurant-bar that is still managed by Lai Kam (and his wife Irene) — who first trained his niece, Hong Kong's famous wind surfing Ladies World Champion Olympics gold medalist, Lee Lai Shan. In fact, Lai San used to serve me beers many years ago when she was still a young girl helping out!

5

This is a great spot to spend an entire Sunday afternoon, as the shaded tables and bar are always caressed by sea breezes, and the place draws an interesting clientele that is happily conversational.

Just like the rest of Hong Kong, this island has always been under construction over the years, having its buildings knocked down and its roads dug up and rebuilt. Nonetheless, Cheung Chau is an interesting place where tourists can easily mix with locals.

1. **Cheung Chau attracts people with different regional backgrounds and customs.**
2. **The harbour is lined with deep-sea fishing vessels, fireboats, oilers, sampans, wallah wallahs and sundry.**
3. **Traditional drama**
4. **To see just how many different groups there are, it is best to pay a visit during the Ta Chiu or Bun Festival.**
5. **Lion dance**
6. **Local's favourite beach is the Bhodisattva Bay.**

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# Litang:

## An Oasis on the Way to Tibet

*Photos & Article by Medhi Chebil Link*

A friend of mine introduced me to the ancient town of Litang as the "first town up the stairways to the roof of the world". Located in the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the isolated far west of Sichuan, Litang has a strong frontier flavor with its fortress-like stone houses, and streets that are full of nomads shoppers who have silver swords bound to the belt.

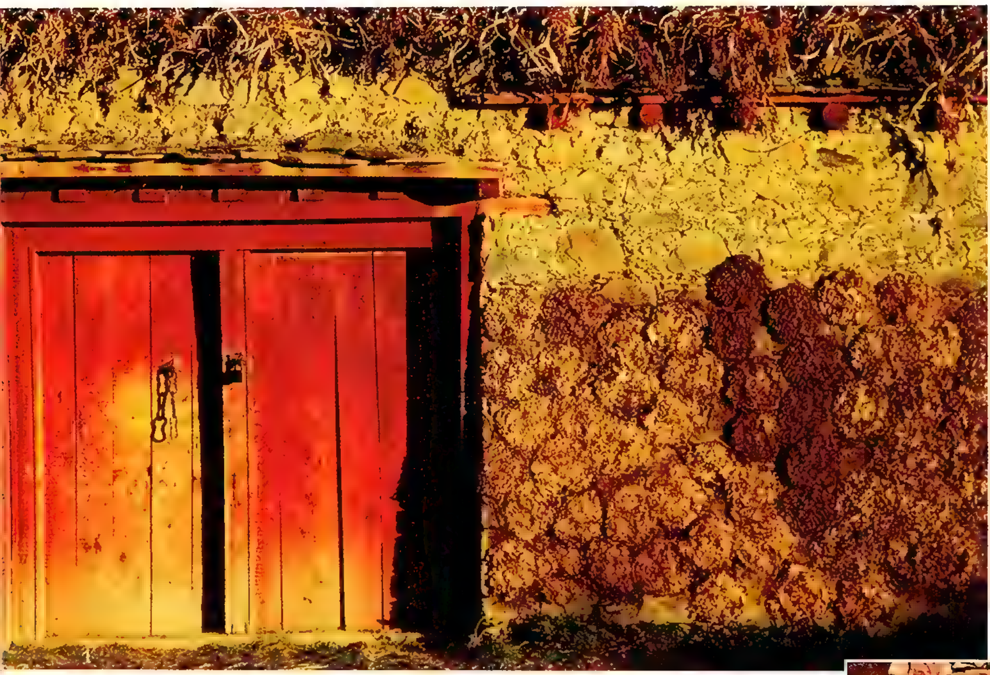
Every July, Litang hosts a world-renowned horse festival that makes it a spotlight on the highway between Chengdu and Lhassa. But I rather came here looking for the utter peacefulness of the most remote tourist area in China: there is no airport and it takes at least two long days of bus travel to get to Litang from any major city.

Fortunately, the drive was very scenic and I felt like I was travelling between seasons as I went from the green valleys, up through the red and yellow autumn of the mountain forest before finally reaching the treeless and windblown Tibetan plateau. It is here that lies the town of Litang, at 3900 m above sea level. As the road led gently to an overlooking position, I could see how impressively the village blended into its wild environment.

Many local houses are made of brown stones that camouflages with the barren landscape. Only the richly decorated windows stand out, in a festival of buoyant colours — shades of greens, red, yellow and blue matched by the numerous small flags overhanged over the main streets. Litang, where horseback travel is still widespread, is also a place where new technologies, like the Internet, are popular. The result is an incredible blend of timeless tradition and modernity.

As an outside visitor, I couldn't help being amazed at discovering such an isolated place being so lively. Litang's streets are always busy with nomads wearing colourful yak

1. **A stunning view of the centuries-old Litang lamasery.**
2. **A rainbow appears behind the typically decorated Litang houses, whose hand painted windows stand out in the sunshine.**
3. **Prayer flags attached to a Tibetan stupa. The prayers printed on these flags are supposed to be carried away by the wind in order to bless the countryside.**
4. **These young Tibetan students are playing on their way to the Litang lamasery.**
5. **The sight of horse grazing is very common in the vast open fields surrounding Litang.**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fur, for whom the town is an important supply centre and a good place for socialising. The town brings a spark of human life in the middle of the desolate and untamed Tibetan plateau, truly deserving to be branded as an oasis.

After walking a few minutes out of town I found myself in the vast open field. This place was like the roof of the world, with a surrounding range of snowcapped mountains as far as the eyes can see. The sky itself looked brighter and bigger whereas my lungs seemed to shrink as even a moderate effort of physical activity was enough to quicken my breath... I realized that I had just started to feel the mild rarefaction of oxygen. As soon as the sun disappeared behind a cloud, the temperature dropped and a chilling wind reminded me of the high altitude of the settlement.

1. **Litang villagers use their stone houses walls to dry dung, which will become their burning fuel.**
2. **A Litang nun walks pass a wall with painted Tibetan sacred mantras.**
3. **Tibetan statue in the centre of Litang.**

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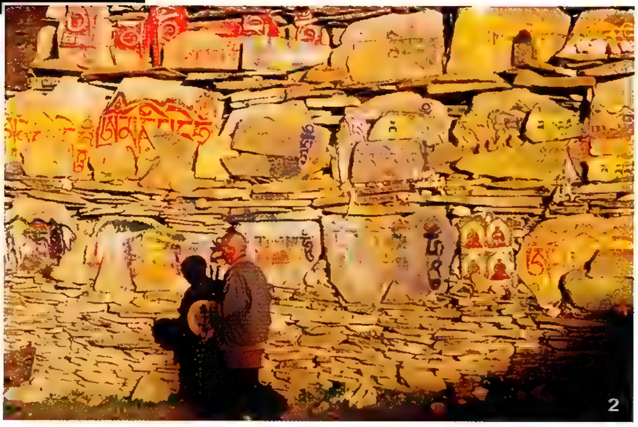
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From here I could clearly see several Tibetan stupas and a red brick wall shining above the village. This is the ancient Litang lamasery, built after the passage of the Fourth Dalai Lama some 400 years ago, and home to more than a thousand monks nowadays. As I made my way uphill to the lamasery, I met many friendly villagers trying to overcome the language barrier to chat with me. Entire families were working on the new harvest of straw, labouring it in the middle of the streets. Hoards of joyful younger kids roamed and played around, while the weathered faces of the elderly locals greeted visitors with a heartwarming "Tashidelek", the equivalent of "Hello" in Tibetan.

The night was now falling and the multicultural population of Litang gathered at outdoor food stalls in the streets lining the town centre. Chinese and Tibetan alike coagulated around the warm barbecue facilities and shared diverse grilled meats, before heading inside a bar to watch the latest video filmed in Lhassa. While sitting down with my newfound friends and sipping a hot mug of tea, I finally realised that a town like Litang was all about getting together in a harsh though beautiful environment.

**Out of 21 species of alligators in the world, China owes one, known as Yangzi Alligator, also dubbed "Earth Dragon". It is the first-class national protected species in the country, prohibited in trade under the United Nations Convention.**

# Acquainting Yourself with Yangzi Alligator

*Photos & Article by Sheng Changfeng*

Prior to the 50s, Yangzi Alligators lived extensively in provinces at the lower Yangtze River. Yet, their habitat has ever since been shrunk to a small region in the southeast of Anhui Province.

Fossils of Yangzi Alligators dating back to the Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene Epoch and the Neolithic Age have been found in Juggar Basin in Xinjiang Province as well as Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Hainan Province. From the fossils it was evident that both Yangzi Alligators and dinosaurs were of the same origin. Earth movement and climatic changes due to glaciations seventy million years ago wiped out all dinosaurs; yet, Yangzi Alligators survived. Experts believe that the hibernating practice in caves of Yangzi Alligators may be the reason why they could escape the catastrophe.

## Characteristics of Yangzi Alligators

Yangzi Alligators are of medium to small size, comparing to other species of alligators. They are usually not longer than two metres (American Mississippian Alligators are longer than four metres). Intimidated to be close to human and fond of tranquility, they prey on fish, shellfish, shrimps, frogs and aqua-insects. Between late April and early October each year is the active and mating season for Yangzi Alligators, a period when they often hide themselves from people during daytime and spend the night catching their preys. They have high reproductive rate: some female alligators could lay more than 30 eggs. Yangzi Alligators mate, lay eggs, and dig caves in June. Their eggs usually stay in the brushes in the wilderness for 60 days, before baby alligators hatch out. More interestingly, it's the average temperature of that hatching time that determines the gender of baby alligators: in general, an average temperature of 33°C and above will result in male alligators; an average below 28°C will bring along female alligators. The little alligators, after birth, will be brought by the mother to be raised in the newly-dug caves. Their caves are quite sophisticated. The openings of the caves are close to water, with space enough for a one-metre-long body to move easily. More, there are both "water bed" and "earth bed" in the caves to satisfy their amphibious nature.

## The Fate of Yangzi Alligators

The south of Anhui Province is a significant reserve area for Yangzi Alligators, where there are ten reserve points. It is estimated that there are roughly less than 150 wild Yangzi Alligators left. The main reason leading to this drastic drop in the number is the rapid growth of population in the area; lots of alligators have lost their habitat.

Although artificial reproduction has successfully bred over ten thousand Yangzi Alligators in the reproduction centres, most of them ended up vanishing due to either the poisonous insecticides used in the farms, or the lack of wetland to live. Some died in hunger in the farms as they could not find food.

As such, the low-lying marsh areas have to be kept from industrial pollution. Meanwhile, more artificially-reproduced alligators are placed among the wild breeds — all with the aim of saving this endangered species.

*Translated by Dora Tsang*

1. **Nowadays, it is unlikely to shoot a picture of wide little alligators. The lives of these two artificially reproduced alligators are in the hands of human.**
2. **Staff members at the reproduction area in Xiajiadu, Xuancheng City, are cleaning off the duckweed in the ponds for the alligators.**
3. **Acutely alert, a full-grown wild alligator is crouching at the cave of a reserve point.**

# BITS AND PIECES OF JIUZHAIGOU

Jiuzhaigou is situated in Nanping County, Sichuan Province, and it encompasses an area of 720 km$^2$. The valley, a fairyland gifted by nature, is abounded in virgin forests, endangered plants, golden monkeys, white geese, pandas and many other rare and precious animals.

The scenic spot of Shuzheng Lake is the entrance to the splendid Jiuzhaigou. With a total length of 14 km, Shuzheng contains over 40 various lakes, occupied 40% of the total in Jiuzhaigou. Stretching along Shuzheng Valley for five to six kilometres, the lakes named respectively as: Reed Lake, Bonsai Lake, Spark Lake, Crouching Dragon Lake, Shuzheng Waterfall, and Tiger Lake, etc.

Shuzheng Waterfall is actually composed of many follow-on falls, formed by lakes flowing down from the stair-like valley. Waterfalls with great momentum and deafening noise plummet deep into the lake below. On the dykes of these lakes, kinds of plateau bushes put down their roots deeply, forming many special plant groups and a marvelous natural spectacle.

At the end of Shuzheng scenic area is the imposing Nuorilang Waterfall. Far from the waterfall, astonishing thundering noise, water smoke and colour rainbows in the sky form a wide and dynamic water screen of grandeur.

Walk to the southwest of Nuorilang Waterfall, you will reach Rize Valley, where one would find exciting and astonishing sights such as Pearl Bay, Five Flowers Lake, Arrow Bamboo Lake, etc. Passing over the Rize Reserve Station and crossing over the Swan Lake, you will come to the end of the 16-km-long mountain road after climbing up to the lofty precipice named Jianyan Cliff. Compared with the delicacy of Shuzheng Lake and the charming view of Norilang scenic spots, the sights of the hardly traversed Jianyan Cliff region is cruder and more imposing, adding to landscape diversity of Jiuzhaigou.

## GETTING THERE & ACCOMMODATION: See Feature Story p.21.

## MAIN ATTRACTIONS

### Reed (Luwei) Lake

It is a 1,400 m-long lake over-grown with reeds. A clear brook zigzags its way through the marshes, where waterfowls are seen hovering overhead. When the season turns, the green meandering brook presents a striking contrast with the yellow spread of reeds.

### Pearl (Zhenzhu) Bay

A stream rushes down its 20° slope into the Pearl Bay, splashing water like millions of bouncing silver pearls. The steam then goes on down to form fantastic waterfalls of various shape with thunderous roars echoed by the deep valley.

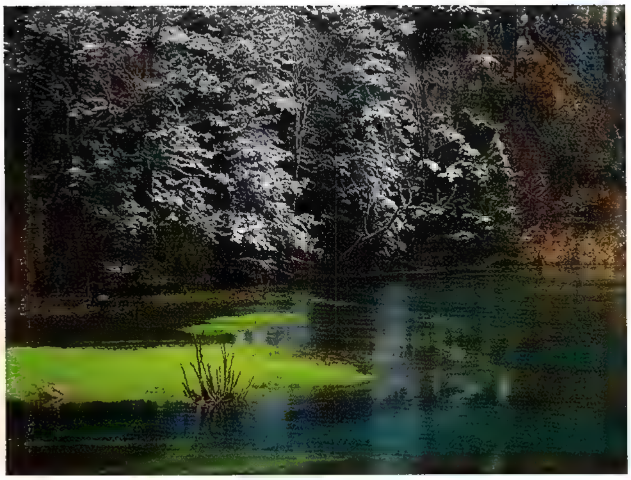
### Five Flowers (Wuhua) Lake

Looking down to the Five Flowers Lake, you can even clearly see water bubbling out of a well at the bottom of the lake.

Due to different water depths and silts on the bottom, Five Flowers Lake's water assumes a variety of colours as beautiful as a peacock's feathers under the sun light, such as light yellow, dark green, deep blue, jadeite....

### Long Lake

Being the largest lake in Jiuzhaigou, Long Lake is about 7.5 km long with a maximum depth of 100 m. The melted snow from the South Peak and the waters of surrounding mountain streams all find their way into Long Lake, which has no exit. The excess water either evaporates or seeps into the ground. Magically, the water never spills over the banks in spite of downpours in summer, and it won't dry up in the other seasons either.



### Tiger (Laohu) Lake

Situated directly above Shuzheng Waterfall, the profound and peaceful Tiger Lake is elevated at about 2000 m. It accumulates great momentum, which makes the waterfall all the more glorious.

### Rhino (Xiniu) Lake

With a shallow depth of 12 m, Rhino Lake covers an area of over 200 m$^2$. The volume of this broad and dark blue water keeps about the same level all year round. Legend has it that the peaceful Rhino Lake was endowed with mysterious power, and it is also the only place in Jiuzhaigou that offers boat-renting service to visitors.

### Nuorilang Waterfall

The name Nuorilang means magnificent and splendid in Tibetan language. Nuorilang Waterfall is elevated at about 2400 m. Being 32 m-wide and 25 m-high, it is one of China's largest calcium waterfalls. When the sun is shining, the magic and gorgeous rainbows above would enchant every visitor.

### Mirror (Jing) Lake

Mirror Lake is surrounded by precipitous cliffs covered with multi-layers of dense forests. Every time the sun breaks the rosy dawn, the lake looks exactly like a plane mirror, which reflects clearly all around: blue sky, white clouds, distant mountains and trees nearby.

### Panda (Xiongmao) Lake

Panda Lake is 14 m deep, with an area of 90,000 m$^2$, and it used to be the haunting place of giant pandas. Interestingly enough, the white rocks here all have special black "veins", which looks exactly like a panda.

### Arrow Bamboo (Jianzhu) Lake

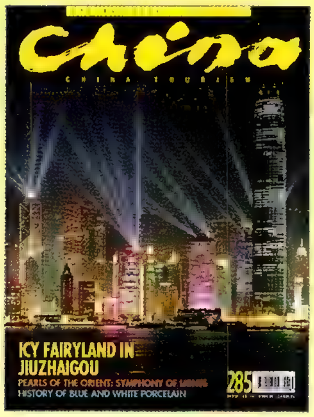
Arrow Bamboo Lake is elevated at 2700 m. It is six metres deep, and covers an area of 170,000 m$^2$. In the bank of the lake, bamboo is evergreen and firs are standing erect. Reflected in the Lake are the undulating hills and swaying bamboo. Even in the severe cold winters, the lake is still glistening and full of life.

### Swan (Tiane) Lake

Having an altitude of 3000 m, Swan Lake is a semi-marsh lake with grasses and wild flowers. This is the favourite place for swans and wild ducks to pay their frequent visits.

### Multicolour (Wucai) Pond

Multicolour Pond covers an area of 6000 m$^2$, with a depth of seven metres. It is situated below the Long Lake and is deeply hidden among high-elevated forests. Being the quintessence of the whole Jiuzhaigou, the pond is full of aquatic plants such as sponges, algae, ferns, reeds and bushes. The different chlorophyll of the plants gives out different colours to begin with, but it is the calcium carbonate in the pond water that makes the colouring effect more fascinating. The result is the mix patches of endless combination of diverse colours: light green, milky white, neon yellow and pale blue....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# Readership Survey

*China Tourism* always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

**Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.**

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Icy Fairyland in Jiuzhaigou** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **The Saltpan Village of Hainan** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Putting My Feet Up at Shaolin** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **History of Blue and White Porcelain** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **The Battle of the Celebration** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Others:** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | Excellent | Good | Average | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Photographs** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Cover** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **Articles** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
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**Other Opinions:** ________________________________________

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Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.

# HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUE NO. 286

## **Feature Story:** A Tale of Two Cities: Beijing & Taipei

Beijing and Taipei, the most prominent cities on both sides of the Straits, are of strikingly different characters and charms. Beijing is modest, historic and imperial, while Taipei is youthful, trendy and ironically, more superstitious.

Nowadays, Beijing has been diluting its historic sentiments through urban renewal. Siheyuan (quadrangle courtyard house), Hutong (alleys between rows of Siheyuan), as well as legacies from the ancestors, have been eroded.

Beijing old-timers could not help but lamenting. The Taipei counterparts, however, could hardly empathize since the most ancient building in Taipei is barely half-a-century-old. Taiwanese would not even blink when it comes to knocking down former ruins, for they have the blessing of being young!

## **On the Way:** Irresistible Hot Springs of Yunnan

Of all types of travel, a trip to the idyllic hot spring resorts must be the most popular — just imagine, the frazzled nerves of the city-dwellers are well and truly calmed by the tranquil surroundings, and all of their senses are indulged by the well-appointed holiday haven....

When it comes to getting away for a seductive soak in hot springs, most people would think of Hokkaido, Taipei or Zhuhai. However, there are two hot springs in Yunnan that may truly give you a pleasant surprise!

## **Discoveries:** The Story of the Grave Robbers

The thousands-year-old ancient city of Xi'an has arisen endless imagination and curiosity of people. What's more, the precious relics and treasures left by the past emperors have also caught the attentions of burglars and thieves.

Sadly, it is still too common to find Xi'an's relics, which were stolen from the mausoleums and temples, make an appearance overseas nowadays.

Despite tremendous effort from the government, the robbers are getting more sophisticated and successful in their trades. Here're some of their stories...

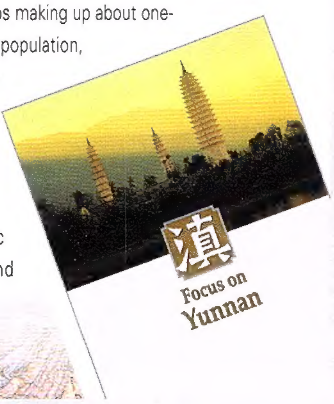
## **Landscapes:** The Roof of Hunan – Mt. Hu Ping

I once visited a high mountain some 100 km north to the well-known Zhangjiajie Scenic Area in Hunan Province. It is called Hu Ping Mountain (meaning "kettle and bottle"), which has the appearance of a kettle and a bottle. Perhaps overshadowed by the fame of neighboring Zhangjiajie, Mt. Hu Ping has remained little known to the public over the years. Its main peak rising 2,098 m above sea level, making it the highest mountain in the province. Therefore, the mountain is often known as the "Roof of Hunan".

Hard cover ~~HK$150~~ HK$120

## Focus on Yunnan

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-La, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



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## Focus on Fujian

Situated on the southeast coast, Fujian Province overlooks Taiwan Island across the Taiwan Strait. Its mountainous landscape includes the Wuyi Mountain Scenic Area, one of the UN World Heritage sites in China. The province's zigzag coastlines, numerous beaches and charming seas offer spectacular scenic beauty as well as historical and cultural interest in such places as the Drumming Wave Islet in Xiamen and the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island.

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Focus on
Fujian

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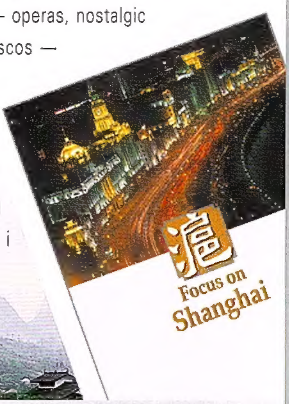
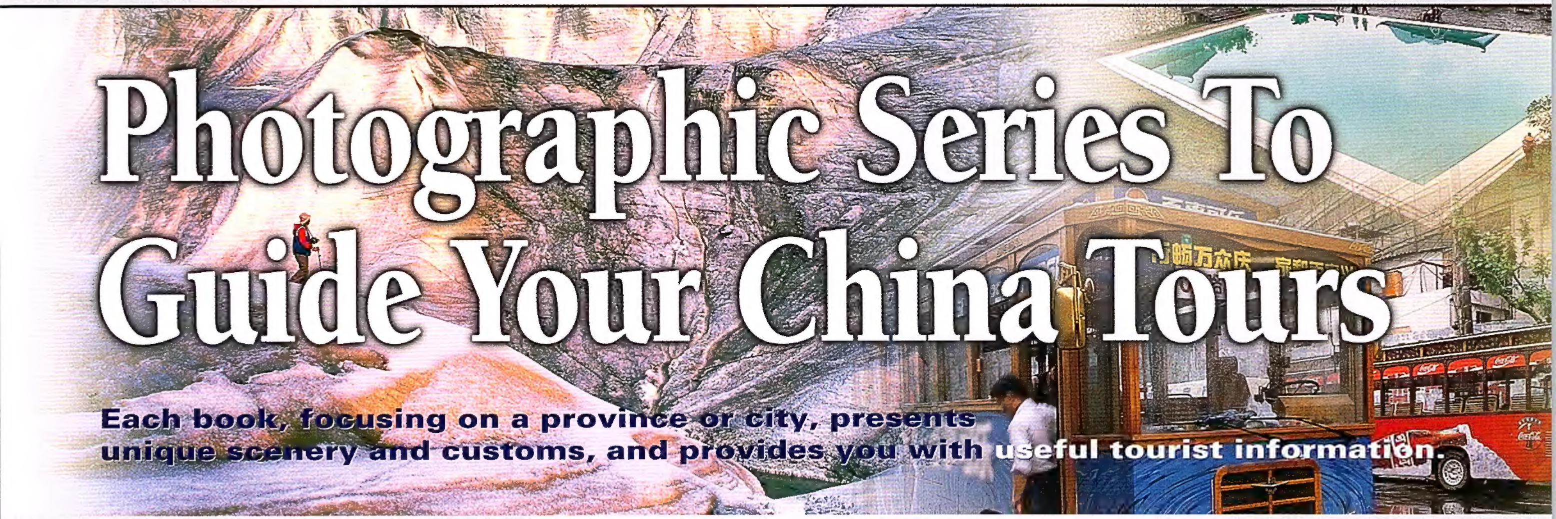
## Focus on Shanghai

Shanghai, the largest metropolis in China, and formerly the Far East financial centre, has experienced dramatic development over the past century. The world-famous Bund along the Huangpu River shows you buildings of different historical periods and varied architectural styles, while skyscrapers are rising in the new area of Pudong. Shanghai's multiculturism is seen in its music — operas, nostalgic jazz and discos — and in the busy commercial district of Nanjing and Huaihai roads.





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## Focus on Shaanxi

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.

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Shaanxi

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## Focus on Guangdong

An important gateway into China, the fertile Pearl River Delta of the southern province of Guangdong fans out from Guangzhou to the South China Sea and borders Hong Kong and Macao. The province's natural scenic spots include the limestone pinnacles of Zhaoqing's Seven Star Crags, the red sandstone of Danxia Mountain, and the volcanic beauty of Xiqiao Mountain. The capital, Guangzhou, offers plenty of history in its museums, temples, mosques and old colonial buildings.

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## Focus on Guizhou

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.

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## Focus on Tianjin

Tianjin, one of the four municipalities under direct Central Government administration, is an important industrial and commercial centre of China and the biggest port in the north. The history of the city can be found in its Ancient Culture Street, 100-year-old Western-style buildings, Opera Museum and Mazu Temple. Besides the TV Tower and the Haihe River in the city, there are scenic spots in the outskirts, including the Dule Temple and the Great Wall at Huangya Pass.

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## Focus on Xinjiang

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, which provide tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem imbedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak — the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique colourful culture.

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## Focus on Beijing

Beijing is a metropolis of everlasting charm. There are simply too many captivating things to see, to experience and to taste in this grand city with both old glamour and new mobility. There are historical sites such as the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs; there are also many scenic spots in its outskirts. Recently, tours have been organised for visitors to taste the real Beijing flavour of life — touring the small back lanes, having tea in a traditional-style teahouse and enjoying the Peking Opera.

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## Focus on Shanxi

Shanxi Province, one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, has impressive ancient architecture and a wealth of well-preserved Buddhist temples, monasteries and grottoes. Among the most famous are the Yungang Grottoes containing some of China's oldest sculptures and Buddhist art, the Yongle Palace, the Jinci Temple, the Hanging Monastery built on a sheer cliff and the Wutai Mountain, one of China's most famous sacred Buddhist lands.

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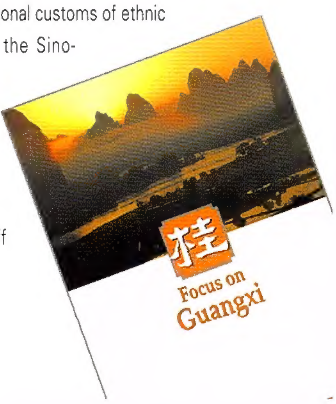
## Focus on Guangxi

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the varied traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.



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At the heart of Shanghai, sits the stately Jin Jiang Hotel. Here, venerable European buildings surround a lush, wooded garden, and house some of the most modern facilities available in Shanghai. The hotel is proud to have received about 300 state leaders and government heads since its opening. Its incomparably attentive service has won high praise from guests from both home and abroad. The Cathay Building of Jin Jiang Hotel which was built in 1926, integrates the traditional classic Gothic style. In 1999, the Cathay Building was renovated into a five-star hotel. It takes on once again an elegant look and combines the traditional classic style with up-to-date facilities.

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